This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

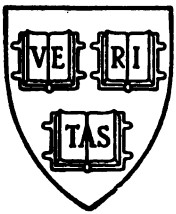
HD WIDENER
HW J9C2 5

TWO SIDES OF THE FACE

BY
A. T.
QUILLER-COUCH

Digitized by Google

21434.59.16



Harvard College Library

FROM

Mrs. Gwendolyn W. Parker

.....

.....

Digitized by Google

TWO SIDES OF THE FACE

MIDWINTER TALES

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

All Rights Reserved

Two Sides of the Face

MIDWINTER TALES

BY

A. T. Quiller-Couch

Bristol
J. W. Arrowsmith, 11 *Quay Street*
London
Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Company Limited
—
1903

Digitized by Google

HARVARD
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
NOV 5 1954

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

	Page
STEPHEN OF STEENS	7
THE HORROR ON THE STAIR	111
THE MAZED ELECTION (1768)	145
THE HOTWELLS DUEL	185
CLEEVE COURT	205
THE COLLABORATORS	249
THE RIDER IN THE DAWN	305
MY LADY'S COACH	329

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Stephen of Steens

A TALE OF WILD JUSTICE

I.

BESIDE a high-road in the extreme West of England stands a house which you might pass many times without suspecting it of a dark history or, indeed, any history worth mention. The country itself, which here slopes westward from the Mining District to Mount's Bay, has little beauty and—unless you happen to have studied it—little interest. It is bare, and it comes near to be savage without attaining to the romantic. It includes, to be sure, one or two spots of singular beauty; but they hide themselves and are not discoverable from the road, which rewards you only by its extravagant wealth of wild flowers, its clean sea-breeze, and perhaps a sunset flaming across the low levels and silhouetting the long shoulder of Godolphin Hill between you and the Atlantic, five miles distant.

Digitized by Google

Noting, as you passed, the size of the house, its evident marks of age, and the meanness of its more modern outbuildings, you would set it down for the residence of an old yeoman family fallen on evil days. And your second thought—if it suggested a second—might be that these old yeomen, not content with a lonely dwelling in a lonely angle of the land, had churlishly built themselves in and away from sight even of the infrequent traveller; for a high wall enclosing a courtlage in front screens all but the upper story with its slated roof, heavy chimneys and narrow upper windows; and these again are half hidden by the boughs of two ragged yew trees growing within the enclosure. Behind the house, on a rising slope, tilled fields have invaded a plantation of noble ash trees and cut it back to a thin and ugly quadrilateral. Ill-kept as they are, and already dilapidated, the modern farm-buildings wear a friendlier look than the old mansion, and by contrast a cheerful air, as of inferiors out-at-elbows, indeed, but unashamed, having no lost dignities to brood upon.

Yet it may happen that your driver—reading, as he thinks, some curiosity in your glance at Steens (for so the house is called), or politely

Digitized by Google

anxious to beguile the way—pulls up his horse and with a jerk of his whip draws your attention to certain pock-marks in the courtlage wall. Or perhaps, finding you really curious but unable from your seat in the vehicle to distinguish them, he dismounts and traces them out for you with the butt of his whip-handle. They are bullet-marks, he says, and there are plenty of others on the upper front of the house within—even grooves cut by bullets in the woodwork of the windows. Then follows a story which you will find some difficulty in swallowing. That in 1734, when Walpole was keeping England at peace—that almost at the moment when he boasted, "There are fifty thousand men slain this year in Europe, and not one Englishman"—an unmilitary pewterer was here holding at bay the Sheriff, his posse and half a regiment of soldiers, slaying seven and wounding many; and that for eight months he defied the law and defended himself, until cannon had to be dragged over the roads from Pendennis Castle to quell him—such a tale may well seem incredible to you unless you can picture the isolation of Cornwall in days when this highway was a quag through which, perhaps twice a week, a train of pack-horses

Digitized by Google

floundered. The man who brought Roger Stephen to justice, though tardily and half against his sense of right, was Sir John Piers, of Nansclowan, hard by. And when Sir John—"the little baronet" as he was called, a Parliamentman, and the one whom Walpole never could bribe—married pretty Mistress Catherine, the heiress of Sherrington across Tamar, his lady's dowry was hauled down through the Duchy to Nansclowan in waggons—a wonder to behold—and stacked in Nansclowan cellars: ten thousand pounds, and every doit of it in half-crowns. Eighty thousand half-crowns!

Be pleased to reflect upon these cellared piles of silver, and what they indicate of Cornish life in those days: and bear in mind that they were stacked in place a short ten years before Roger Stephen, a mile-and-a-half away, first let fly his bullets at the Sheriff, on the principle that an Englishman's house is his castle, and in firm conviction—shared by all the countryside and in the bottom of his heart by Sir John himself—that this particular castle was Roger Stephen's; not perhaps by law, but assuredly by right.

Digitized by Google

II.

FOUR miles south of Steens, and a trifle over, lies the market town of Helston (or "Helleston" as men wrote it in 1734, and ought to write it still); on the road to nowhere and somnolent then as now, but then as now waking up once a year, on the 8th of May, to celebrate the Feast of Flora and welcome back the summer. She is brought in at daybreak with green boughs and singing, and at noon the citizens dance through the streets in her honour, the Mayor himself leading off as the town band strikes up its immemorial quickstep, the staid burgesses following with their partners. At first they walk or amble two and two, like animals coming out of Noah's ark; then, at a change in the tune, each man swings round to the lady behind him, "turns" her, regains his partner, "turns" her too, and the walk is resumed. And so, alternately walking and twirling, the procession sways down the steep main street and in and out of the houses left open for it—along the passage from front

Digitized by Google

door to court or garden, out at the back door, in at the back door of the next open house, and through to the street again—the beadles preceding with wreathed wands, the band with decorated drum, the couples "turning" duly at the break in the tune, though it catch them in the narrowest entrance or half-way down a flight of steps.

On the 8th of May, 1734, at the foot of Coinage-hall Street, hard by the Bowling Green, a pewterer's shop stood open, like its neighbours, to admit the Flora. But the master of the shop and his assistant—he kept no apprentice—sat working as usual at their boards, perhaps the only two men in Helleston who disregarded the public holiday. But everyone knew Roger Stephen to be a soured man, and what old Malachi Hancock did was of no account.

Malachi sat at his bench in the rear of the shop turning the rim of a pewter plate, and Roger Stephen in the front, for the sake of better light, peering into the bowels of a watch which had been brought to him to be cleaned—a rare job, and one which in his sullen way he enjoyed. From youth up he had been badly used. His father, Humphrey

Digitized by Google

Stephen, owned Steens, and was a man of substance; a yeoman with money and land enough to make him an esquire whenever he chose. In those days it was the custom in Cornish families of the better class to send the eldest son to college (usually to Oxford), and thence, unless the care of his estates claimed him at home, into one of the liberal professions. Sometimes the second son would follow him to college and proceed to Holy Orders, but oftener he had to content himself as apprentice to an apothecary or an attorney. The third son would, like Roger Stephen, be bound to a pewterer or watchmaker, the fourth to a mercer, and so on in a descending scale. But Roger, though the only child of a rich man, had been denied his natural ambition, and thrust as a boy into the third class. His mother had died young, and from the hour of her death (which the young man set down to harsh usage) he and his father had detested each other's sight. In truth, old Humphrey Stephen was a violent tyrant and habitually drunk after two o'clock. Roger, self-repressed as a rule and sullen, found him merely abhorrent. During his mother's lifetime, and because she could not do

Digitized by Google

without him, he had slept at Steens and walked to and from his shop in Helleston; but on the day after the funeral he packed and left home, taking with him old Malachi, a family retainer whom Humphrey had long ago lamed for life by flinging a crowbar at him in a fit of passion.

So for twelve years he had lodged and taught Malachi his trade in the dirty, low-browed shop, over which a pewter basin hung for sign and clashed against the tilt whenever a sea-breeze blew. Malachi did his marketing: Roger himself rarely stepped across his threshold, and had never been known to gossip. To marriage he never gave a thought: "time enough for that," he had decided, "when Steens became his, as some day it must"; for the estate ever since the first Stephen acquired it in the Wars of the Roses and gave it his name ("Steens" being but "Stephen's" contracted) had been a freehold patrimony descending regularly from father to son or next heir. All in good time Roger Stephen would marry and install his wife in the manor-house. But the shop in Coinage-hall Street was no place for a woman. She would be a nuisance, sweeping the place out

Digitized by Google

and upsetting him and Malachi; an expense, too, and Roger—always a penurious man—incurred no expense until obliged.

But on a day, about two years before this 8th of May, 1734, word had come down from Steens that his father wished to speak with him.

"Not dying, is he?" Roger asked the messenger in Cornish. Half his customers spoke the old language, and it came readier to his tongue.

The messenger chuckled. "Dying? He'll live to be a hundred! Eh, it's not dying he's after," and the man winked. He was near upon bursting with news—or gossip—of his own.

"That's enough," said Roger. "Go back and tell him that if he's well and wants to talk, he knows where to find me." And he turned back to his work.

Next day old Humphrey Stephen rode down into Helleston in a towering rage, reined up before his son's shop, and dismounted.

"You're a pretty dutiful kind of son," he snarled. "But I've a word that concerns you belike. I'm going to marry again."

"Ah?" said Roger, drawing in his breath

Digitized by Google

and eyeing the old man up and down in a way that disconcerted him. "Who's the poor soul?"

"She lives over to Porthleven," answered his father, "and her name is Mary Nankivell. She's—well, in fact she's a fisherman's daughter; but I've lived long enough to despise differences of that kind."

"I wasn't asking *your* age," said Roger meditatively. "What's the woman's?"

"She'll be twenty next birthday." The old man was sixty-five. "Well, what's your opinion?" he asked testily, for he knew he was doing a wrong thing, and craved an excuse to work himself into a rage.

"On which?" asked Roger, "—you, or the woman?"

"On the marriage." Old Humphrey stood glowering under his eyebrows, and tapped his boot impatiently with the butt of his riding-whip. "I reckoned it might concern you, that's all."

"I can't see that it does." There was that in Roger's slow look which his father found maddening.

"Oh, can't you?" he sneered.

"No, for the life of me," answered Roger.

Digitized by Google

"'Tis wickedness of course, but I've no call to interfere. Take and marry the miserable fool, if you're so minded."

Humphrey Stephen had more to say, but gulped it down and mounted his horse with a devilish grin.

Roger Stephen went back to his work-bench.

Digitized by Google

III.

"PACK of fools!" growled old Malachi as the thump-thump of the drum drew nearer. He rose and shifted his stool to a corner, for the way to the back premises lay through the shop. Roger looked forth into the sunny street, blinked, and, picking up a pair of pincers, returned to his watch.

The band came slowly down the street and halted outside—still in full blast; for between the Market House and the Bowling Green there must be no pause in the Flora-dance or its music. And presently the Mayor himself thrust his red face in at the shop-door.

"Good-mornin'!" he nodded, jigging away with his feet. "You 'll lev' us come through, I suppose?"

"Welcome," grunted Roger.

"And, darn'ee, take care o' my cabbages!" added Malachi. "You ruined half a score of 'em last year with your May-games."

"Cab—" Here the inexorable tune forced His Worship to face about and twirl his partner. "Cabbages?" he resumed. "You

Digitized by Google

dare to use such a word to me, you saucy rascal? Why, I 've sent better men than you to prison for less!"

"I don't doubt it," retorted Malachi. "But King George is above us, and holds even a Mayor responsible for what he treads on. Dance along out, that's a dear man, and if you want to be frolicsome, keep to the paths."

"Of all the unpublicspirited houses I 've danced into this day, this here's the unpublicspiritedest!" exclaimed the Mayor. He had reached by this time the door at the back of the shop, and would have said more; but again the tune took him by the legs compelling him to twirl his partner, and, twirling her, he was swept out of sight.

Roger Stephen still pored over his watch. Several of the dancers—had the will to do it been enough—were minded to stop and rebuke him for his churlishness. A tradesman at work in Helleston on Flora-day in the morning was a scandalous sight. But Roger stood six-foot-three in his socks, and had been a famous wrestler in his youth.

The giddy throng went by, his hunched shoulders expressing his contempt of it. But

Digitized by Google

when all the dancers had paraded through the shop and out into Malachi's cabbage garden, a man appeared in the entrance and said—

"Arise, Master Roger, and dance—or otherwise as your feelings incline you! For Doctor Gaye sends down his compliments, and your father's had a stroke."

Roger Stephen dropped his pincers. "A stroke? Is it serious?"

"Middlin'," answered the man, a wood-cutter on the Steens estate. "He took it at three in the morning and never said another word, but passed away a little under two hours agone; and the funeral 's on Thursday."

Roger laid down the watch and stood erect. The band in the street still thumped out the Flora tune.

"Malachi," said he, "can you dance the Flora?"

"Bejimbers!" answered Malachi, "the old man did his best to spoil my legs, but I feel like trying."

Digitized by Google

IV.

UP at Steens the young widow spent the three days before the funeral in a flutter of the nerves. For reasons of her own she stood in fear of her stepson, and felt herself in hourly desperate need of a male champion. Yet she had pluck as well as a head on her shoulders. She might have summoned—what more natural at such a time?—her old father, the fisherman, over from Porthleven; but she argued it out with herself, and decided that his presence would be a protection rather apparent than real, and might easily set Roger suspecting. Even less politic would be the presence of her Penzance lawyer, Mr. Alfonso Trudgian. In the early morning hours after her husband's death she sat a long while with her hands in her lap, thinking. She was a young and pretty woman, and by no means a bad one. But she had not married old Humphrey for love, and she meant to have her rights now. Also her having married Humphrey was proof of that courage which she now distrusted. While her heart sank at the prospect, she resolved to meet and face Roger alone.

Digitized by Google

He came on horseback that same evening, with Malachi on horseback behind him—both in their best black clothes with hideous black streamers pinned to their hats and dangling. Mrs. Stephen, having made enquiries among the servants—it added to her helplessness that she had never prevailed on Humphrey to dismiss his old servants, though she had made more than one attempt, and they knew it and hated her for it—had Roger's old room prepared for him, and met him at the door with decorous politeness.

Roger had never set eyes on her before. But she had long ago made it her business to see him; had, in fact, put on bonnet and shawl one day and visited Helleston on pretence of shopping, and had, across the width of Coinage-hall Street, been struck with terrified admiration of his stern face and great stature, recognising at a glance that here was a stronger man and better worth respecting than old Humphrey—a very dangerous man indeed for an enemy.

Roger in return considered her merely as a hussy—a designing baggage who had sold herself to an old fool. He came with a mind quite clear about this, and was not the sort

Digitized by Google

of man to dismiss a prejudice easily. But her greeting, though it did not disarm him, forced him to defer hostilities for the moment, and in his room he allowed to himself that the woman had shown sense. He could not well send her packing while the old man lay above ground, and to begin quarrelling, with his corpse in the house, would be indecent. Go the woman should, but during her three days' grace stepson and stepmother had best keep up appearances.

He did not demur, when descending to supper, he found his father's chair removed from its place at the head of the table and his own set at the side on the widow's right. She met him with a smile, too, of which he had to approve; it seemed to say, "I do not forget that we are, and must be, antagonists; but in trifles, and for the short while permitted to us, let us do each other justice." She discussed, in low tones but frankly, the old man's illness—told him what there was to tell, pausing now and then with a silent invitation to question her were he minded, and apologised very prettily for her shortcomings as a hostess.

"But you will, of course, order just what

Digitized by Google

you want. Luckily the servants know you and your ways, and you will forgive anything I have overlooked. In the circumstances——"

She broke off, and Roger found himself grunting that "she wasn't to trouble about that: he'd do well enough." He did not actually thank her for her preparations to make him comfortable, but discovered with a kind of indignant surprise that he had come very near to it. Somehow this woman, whom he had expected to find an ignorant fisher-wench, hoity-toity and brazen or tearful and sullen, was making him painfully conscious of his own boorishness. Out she must go, of course, after the funeral; but he wished he had seen a little more of good company in the past, and he kept up his temper by reminding himself that he had been ill-used and denied a college education.

The meal ended, she rose and swept him a curtsey, neither over-friendly nor stand-offish. "Peggy will bring you the brandy and water," she said, "or, if you prefer it, there is rum in the house. I thought, maybe, the weather was warm for a fire; but, as you see, it is laid, and only needs a light if you feel chilly. Your father liked to sit by a fire even

Digitized by Google

on summer evenings." She did not add that he had invariably come drunk to bed. "But there," she ended with a faint smile, "we have the old servants, and they are not likely to neglect you."

A second curtsey, and she was gone. Roger sat down by the cold hearth and stroked his chin. By-and-by he looked at his fingers, as if (absurdly enough) to make sure he had not shaken hands with her.

Next day this armed but almost friendly neutrality continued. Roger spent the hours in striding about his acres, planning how to improve them and curtail expenses here and there. The farm to be sure was neglected; but here and there he noted improvements, and caught himself wondering if the credit of them belonged to the old man. He left the household to his stepmother, and returned to find his meals ready and his appetite courted by some of his favourite dishes.

At dinner Mrs. Stephen produced and handed to him a sheet of paper. "I thought it might save trouble," she explained, "if I made out a list of folks to be invited to the funeral. You understand that I've only put down those that occurred to me. Please

Digitized by Google

take the list away and strike out or add any names you choose."

Roger was within an ace of telling her to look after this for herself. He had forgotten that these invitations were necessary, and the writing of them would be a nuisance. But he recollected his suspicions, took the paper, and carried it out into the fields to study it. The list was a careful one, and almost all the names belonged to neighbours or old family friends. Half a dozen at most were unfamiliar to him. He pored over these one by one, but scratched none out. "Let the poor creature invite them if they're friends of hers," he decided; "'twill be her last chance." At supper he gave her back the list, and somewhat awkwardly asked her to send the invitations.

Had he been cleverer in the ways of women, he might still have failed to read the glint in her eyes as she folded the paper and thrust it into her bodice.

So the three days passed.

Digitized by Google

V.

THEY buried Humphrey Stephen on the morning of the 11th, and if any of the widow's own friends attended the funeral they forbore to obtrude themselves during the ceremony or at the breakfast which followed it. While the guests drank sherry and ate cold chickens in the dining-room, Mrs. Stephen carried her grief off to her own apartment and left Roger to do the honours. She descended only when the throng had taken leave.

The room, indeed, when she entered, was empty but for three persons. Roger and the family attorney—Mr. Jose, of Helleston—stood by one of the windows in friendly converse, somewhat impatiently eyeing a single belated guest who was helping himself to more sherry.

"What the devil is *he* doing here?" asked Mr. Jose, who knew the man. He turned and bowed as the young widow entered. "I was on the point, madam," said he, "of sending up to request your presence. With your leave, I think it is time to read the deceased's will." He pulled out his watch and glanced again, with meaning, towards the stranger.

Digitized by Google

He had lifted his voice purposely, and the stranger came forward at once with the half of a pasty in one hand and his glass of sherry in the other.

"Certainly," agreed the stranger, with his mouth full of pasty. He nodded familiarly to Mr. Jose, drained his glass, set it down, and wiped his damp fingers on the lappels of his coat. His habits were not pretty, and his manners scarcely ingratiating. The foxy look in his eyes would have spoilt a pleasanter face, and his person left an impression that it had, at some time in the past and to save the expense of washing, been coated with oil and then profusely dusted over with snuff. "Shall we begin?" he asked, drawing a parcel of papers from his breast-pocket.

Roger Stephen glared at him, somewhat as a bull-dog might eye a shrew-mouse. "Who is this?" he demanded.

"This is Mr. Alfonso Trudgian, my lawyer from Penzance," explained the widow, and felt her voice shaking.

"Then he's not wanted."

"But excuse me, Mr. Stephen, this lady's interests——," began Mr. Trudgian.

"If my father's will makes any provision

Digitized by Google

for her I can attend to it without your interference." Roger glanced at Mr. Jose.

"I think," said that very respectable lawyer, "there can be no harm in suffering Mr. Trudgian to remain, as an act of courtesy to Mrs. Stephen. We need not detain him long. The will I have here was drawn by me on the instruction of my late respected client, and was signed by him and witnessed on the 17th of March, one thousand seven hundred and twenty-five. It is his last and (I believe) his only one; for, like many another man otherwise sensible, the deceased had what I may call an unreasoning dislike——"

"What date?" put in Mr. Alfonso Trudgian pertly.

"I beg your pardon?—the 17th of March, one thousand seven hundred and twenty-five."

"Then I'm sorry to interrupt ye, Jose, but since Mr. Roger wants me gone, I have here a will executed by Mr. Stephen on February the 14th last—St. Valentine's day. And it reads like a valentine, too. 'To my dear and lawful wife, Elizabeth Stephen, I devise and bequeath all my estate and effects, be they real or personal, to be hers absolutely. And this I do in consideration of her faithful and

Digitized by Google

constant care of me.—Signed, Humphrey Stephen. Witnesses, William Shapcott'—that's my clerk—'and Alfonso Trudgian.' That's short enough, I hope, and sweet."

Mr. Jose reached out a shaking hand for the document, but Roger was before him. At one stride he had reached Mr. Trudgian and gripped him by the collar, while his other hand closed on the paper.

The attorney shrank back, squealing like a rabbit. "Let me go! 'Tis only a copy. Let me go, I say!"

"You dirty cur!" Roger's broad palm crumpled up the paper, and with a swift backward movement tossed it at Mrs. Stephen's feet. "Out of the way, Jose; he asks me to let him go, and I will." He lifted the wretched man, and, flinging him on the window-seat, pinned him there for a moment with his knee while he groped for the latch and thrust open the broad lattice.

A moment later, as she stood and shook, Mrs. Stephen saw her legal adviser swung up by his collar and the seat of his breeches and hurled, still squealing, out upon the flagstones of the courtlage; saw him tumble sprawling, pick himself up, and flee for the

Digitized by Google

gate without even waiting to pick up his wig or turning to shake his fist. Nay, without one backward look, but weakly clutching at his coat, which had been split up the back and dangled in halves from his neck, he broke for the open country and ran.

"Thank you," said she, as Roger swung round upon her in turn. Her lips were smiling, but she scarcely recognised her own voice. "Am—am I to follow by the same way?"

Roger did not smile, but took her by the wrist.

"Gently, Mr. Stephen—gently, I implore you!" interposed Mr. Jose.

Roger did not seem to hear, and the woman made no resistance. He led her through the hall, across the threshold of Steens, and up the courtlage path. At the gate, as he pushed it wide for her, his grip on her wrist relaxed, and, releasing her, he stood aside.

She paused for one instant, and gently inclined her head.

"Stepson, you are a very foolish man," said she. "Good-day to you!"

She passed out. Roger closed the gate grimly, slipped forward its bolt, and walked back to the house.

Digitized by Google

But the woman without, as he turned his back, stepped aside quickly, found the wall, and, hidden by it, leaned a hand against the stonework and bowed her head.

A moment later, and before Roger had reached the front door, her hand slipped and she fell forward among the nettles in a swoon.

Digitized by Google

VI.

"WELL, *that's* over!" said Roger, returning to the dining-room and mopping his brow. "Upon my word, Jose, that nasty varmint gave me quite a turn for the moment, he spoke so confident."

"Tut, tut!" ejaculated Mr. Jose, pacing the room with his hands clasped beneath his coat-tails.

"Do you know," Roger continued musingly, "I'm not altogether sorry the woman showed her hand. Sooner or later she had to be got rid of, and a thing like that is easier done when your blood's up. But Lord! could anyone have thought such wickedness was to be found in the world!"

The lawyer rounded on him impatiently. "Mr. Stephen," said he, in the very words the widow had used two minutes before, "you're a very foolish man, if you'll excuse my saying it."

"Certainly," Roger assured him. "But be dashed to me if I see why."

"Because, sir, you're on the wrong side of

Digitized by Google

the law. Your father executed that will, and it 's genuine; or the vermin—as you call him—would never have taken that line with me."

"I daresay. But what of that?"

"What of that? Why, you've cut yourself off from compromise—that's all. You don't think a fellow of that nature—I say nothing of the woman—will meet you on any reasonable terms after the way you've behaved!"

"Compromise? Terms? Why, dang it all, Jose! You're not telling me the old fool could will away Steens, that has passed as freehold from father to son these two hundred years and more?"

"The law allows it," began Mr. Jose; but his outraged client cut him short.

"The law allows it!" he mimicked. "How soon d'ye think they'll get the country to allow it? Why, the thing's monstrous—'tis as plain as the nose on your face!"

"Oh, you'll get sympathy, no doubt!"

"Sympathy? What the devil do I want with sympathy? I want my rights, and I 've got 'em. What's more, I 'll keep 'em—you see! Man, if that limb of Satan dared to come back, d 'ye think the whole countryside

Digitized by Google

wouldn't uphold me? But he won't; he won't dare. You heard him squeal, surely?"

"Drat the very name of politics!" exclaimed Mr. Jose so inconsequently that Roger had good excuse for staring.

"I don't take ye, Jose."

"No, I daresay not. I was thinking of Sir John. He's up at Westminster speechifying against corruption and Long Parliaments, and, the pamphleteers say, doing ten men's work to save the State; but for your sake I wish he was home minding the affairs of his parish. For I do believe he'd be for you at the bottom of his heart, and, if he used his influence, we might come to a settlement."

"'Settlement'?" Roger well-nigh choked over the word. He took three paces across the room and three paces back. His face twitched with fury, but for the moment he held himself in rein. "Look here, Jose, are you my lawyer or are you not? What in thunder do I want with Sir John? Right's right, and I'm going to stand on it. You *know* I'm in the right, and yet, like a cowardly attorney, at the first threat you hum and haw and bethink you about surrender. I don't know what *you* call it, sir, but *I* call

Digitized by Google

it treachery. 'Settlement?' I've a damned good mind to believe they've bought you over!"

Mr. Jose gathered up his papers. "After that speech, Mr. Stephen, it don't become me to listen to more. As your father's friend I'm sorry for you. You're an ill-used man, but you're going to be a worse-used one, and by your own choice. I wish indeed I may prove mistaken, but my warning is, you have set you feet in a desperate path. Good-day, sir."

And so Roger Stephen quarrelled with his wisest friend.

Digitized by Google

VII.

YOUNG Mrs. Stephen awoke in her bed of nettles, and sitting up with her back to the wall, pressed her hands to her temples and tried to think. She could not. For the moment the strain had broken her, and her mind ran only on trifles—her wardrobe, a hundred small odds and ends of personal property left behind her in the house.

She could not think, but by instinct she did the wisest thing—found her feet and tottered off in the direction of Nansclowan. She had barely passed the turning of the road shutting her off from his sight when Mr. Jose came riding out by the stable gate and turned his horse's head towards Helleston.

When Lady Piers heard that Mrs. Stephen was below in the morning-room and wished to speak with her, she descended promptly, but with no very goodwill towards her visitor. She suspected something amiss, for the maid who carried up the news had added that the

Digitized by Google

widow was "in a pretty pore," and wore not so much as a shawl over her indoor garments. Also she knew, as well as her commoner neighbours, that the situation at Steens must be a difficult one. Now Lady Piers was a devoted and gentle-hearted woman, a loving wife and an incomparable housekeeper (the news had found her busy in her still-room), but her judgment of the young fisher-girl who had wheedled old Humphrey Stephen into matrimony was that of the rest of her sex; and even good and devout women can be a trifle hard, not to say inhuman, towards such an offender.

Therefore Lady Piers entered the morning-room with a face not entirely cordial, and, finding the pretty widow in tears, bowed and said, "Good-morning, Mrs. Stephen. What can I do for you?"

"He's turned me out!" Mrs. Stephen sobbed.

"Indeed!" Lady Piers was not altogether surprised. "He used no violence, I hope?"

"I d—don't know what you'd c—call violence, my lady, but he pitched Mr. Trudgian through the window."

"That seems to border on violence," said

Digitized by Google

Lady Piers with a faint smile. "But who is Mr. Trudgian?"

"He's my lawyer, and he comes from Penzance."

"I see." Lady Piers paused and added, "Was it not a little rash to introduce this Mr. Trudgian? In the circumstances"—she laid a slight stress here—"I should have thought it wiser to leave the house as quietly as possible."

"But—but the house is *mine*, my lady . . . every stick of it willed to me, and the estate too! Mr. Trudgian had drawn up the will, and was there to read it."

"You don't mean to tell me——" Lady Piers started up from her chair. "'Tis atrocious!" she exclaimed, and a pink spot showed itself on each of her delicate cheeks. "Indeed, Mrs. Stephen, you cannot dare to come to me for help; and if you have come for my opinion, I must tell you what I think—that you are a wicked, designing young woman, and have met with no more than your deserts."

"But he called me a dear wife, and he spoke of my loving care."

"Who did? Mr. Roger?"

Digitized by Google

"My husband did, my lady."

"Oh!" There was a world of meaning in Lady Piers' "oh!" Even a good and happy wife may be allowed to know something of men's weakness. "And Mr. Trudgian, I suppose, put that down on parchment?"

Mrs. Stephen gazed for a moment disconsolately out of the window, and rose to go.

"Nay," Lady Piers commanded, "you must sit down for a while and rest. Sir John is in London, as you know, and were he at home I feel sure you would get little condolence from him. But you are weak and over-worn, and have few friends, I doubt, between this and Porthleven. You cannot walk so far. Rest you here, and I will send you some food, and order John Penwartha to saddle a horse. I can lend you a cloak too, and you shall ride behind him to Porthleven. A *friend* I cannot find, to escort you; but John is a sensible fellow, and keeps his opinions to himself."

Digitized by Google

VIII.

NEXT day Roger went over the house with Jane Trewoofe, the cook, and collected all his stepmother's belongings. These he did up carefully into three bales, and had them ready at the gate by six o'clock on the following morning, when Pete Nancarrow, the carrier between Helleston and Penzance, passed with his pack-ponies.

"You 're to deliver these to the woman's own cottage over to Porthleven," was his order, conveyed by old Malachi.

Two days later, towards evening, Roger himself happened to be mending a fence on the slope behind the house, when he looked along the road, spied Pete returning, and stepped down to meet him.

"You delivered the parcels?"

Pete nodded.

"What 's your charge?" asked Roger, dipping his hand in his pocket.

"Bless you, they 're paid for. I took the goods round by way of Penzance, meaning

Digitized by Google

to deliver them on the return journey; but in Market-jew Street whom should I run up against but the widow herself, sporting it on the arm of a lawyer-fellow called Trudgian. 'Hullo, mistress!' says I, 'I've a pack of goods belonging to you that I'm taking round to Porthleven.' So she asked what they were, and I told her. 'There's no need for you to drag them round to Porthleven,' said she, 'for I'm lodging here just now while Mr. Trudgian gets up my case.' And with that they fetched me over to Trudgian's office and paid me down on the table; 'for,' says the lawyer, 'we won't put expense on a man so poor as Roger Stephen is like to be, though he *have* given these fal-lals a useless journey.' 'Tell ye what, master; they mean to have you out of Steens if they can, that pair."

"Let 'em come and try," said Roger grimly.

The packman laughed. "That's what I told the folks over to Penzance. That's the very speech I used: 'Let 'em come and try,' I said. Everyone's prettily talking about the case."

"What can it concern anyone over there?"

Digitized by Google

"Why, bless you, the wide world's ringing with it! And look here, master, I'll tell you another thing. The country's with you to a man. You've been shamefully used, they say, and they mean it. Why, you've only to lift a hand and you can have 'em at your back to defy the Sheriff and all his works—if ever it should come to that."

"It won't," said Roger, turning back to the house.

This was the first news to reach him that his affairs were being publicly discussed, and for a moment it annoyed him. Of danger he had scarcely a suspicion. Here at Steens the days passed quietly, the servants obeying him as though he had been master for years. They brought him no gossip, and any rumours Malachi picked up Malachi kept to himself. Roger, never a man to talk with servants, brooded rather on the attempted wrong. That in itself was enough to sour a man. He had met it with prompt action and baulked it, but he nursed a sense of injury. He felt especially bitter towards Mr. Jose, first of all for permitting such a will to be made without discovering it, and next for shilly-shallying over the decisive counter-

Digitized by Google

stroke. To possible trouble ahead he gave no thought.

The days drew on to hay-harvest, and on the 5th of June Roger and his men started to mow Behan Parc, a wide meadow to the east of the house. Roger took a scythe himself: he enjoyed mowing.

By noon the field was half-shorn, and the master, pausing to whet his scythe, had begun to think upon dinner, when at a call from Malachi he looked up to see a ragged wastrel of a man picking his way across the swathes towards him with a paper in his hand.

"Hullo! What's this?" he demanded, taking the paper and unfolding it.

As his eye took in its contents the blood surged up and about his temples. He tore the paper across and across again, flung the pieces on the ground, and stooped for his scythe.

The wastrel cast a wild look about him and fled. As he turned, presenting his back, Roger hurled his hone. It caught him a little above the shoulder-blades, almost on the neck, and broke in two pieces. The unhappy man pitched forward on his face.

Some of the mowers ran to pick him up.

Digitized by Google

"Thee'st killed him, master, for sure!" cried one.

"Ch't!" snarled Roger, and strode back to the house without another look.

The law was in motion, then, and in motion to oust him! He could scarcely believe it; indeed, it was scarcely thinkable. But over his first blind, incredulous rage there swept a passionate longing to be alone in the house —to sit in it and look about him and assure himself. Without thought of what he did, he touched the door-jamb reverently as he stepped across the threshold. He wandered from room to room, and even upstairs, feeling the groove in the oaken stair-rail familiar under his palm. Yes, it was his, this home of dead and gone Stephens; it was here, and he was its master. And of this they would dare to deprive him —they, an interloping trollop and a dirty little attorney! No, it couldn't be done. He clenched and unclenched his fists. It could never be done in England; but the wrong was monstrous, all the same.

By-and-by he grew calmer, went down to the parlour, ate his dinner, and sallied out to the meadow again. The wastrel had disappeared. Roger asked no questions, but took

Digitized by Google

up his scythe, stepped into the rank, and mowed. He mowed like a giant, working his men fairly to a standstill. They eyed him askance, and eyed each other as they fell behind. But disregarding the rank, he strode on and on, scything down the grass—his grass, grown on his earth, reaped with his sweat.

Digitized by Google

IX.

THE hay had been gathered and stacked, and the stacks thatched; and still Roger lived on at Steens unmolested. He began to feel that the danger had blown over, and for this security old Malachi was responsible. Malachi had witnessed the scene in the hayfield, and dreamed for nights after of the look on his master's face. The next time a messenger arrived (he told himself) there would be murder done; and the old man, hazy upon all other points of the law and its operations, had the clearest notion of its answer to murder. He had seen gibbets in his time, and bodies dangling from them in chains.

He began to watch the road for messengers, and never slackened his watch. Six in all he intercepted during the next three weeks and took their papers to carry to his master. It seemed to him to be raining papers. He could not read, and, had he been able, their contents would have conveyed no meaning to him. He burned every one in secret.

It is possible, and even likely, that had they reached Roger they would have had no effect

Digitized by Google

beyond angering him. He believed—as for miles around every man not a lawyer believed —that freehold land which had once descended to an heir could not be alienated without the next heir's consent: nor in all the countryside had such a wrong been perpetrated within living memory. It would have taken twenty lawyers with their books to shake him in this conviction. But it is a fact that he never received a last letter from Lawyer Jose imploring him to appear and fight the suit entered against him, and not to sit in obstinate slumber while his enemies destroyed him.

After this for some weeks the stream of messengers ceased, and even Malachi breathed more freely. He still, however, kept his eye lifting, and was able to intercept the document announcing that in the case of "Stephen *versus* Stephen" judgment had been entered against the defendant, who was hereby commanded to evade the premises and yield up possession without delay. This also he destroyed.

But there arrived a morning when, as Roger sat at breakfast, the old man came running with news of a gang of men on the road, not six hundred yards away, and approaching the house.

Digitized by Google

"Are the gates bolted?" asked Roger, rising and taking down two guns from the rack over the chimney-piece.

"Ay, master, bolted and locked." With some vague notion that thereby he asserted possession, Roger had bought new padlocks and clapped them on all three gates—the wrought-iron one admitting to the courtlage, the side wicket, and the great folding-doors of the stable-yard at the back.

"Where's Joseph?"—this was the farm-hind.

"In the challs." *

"Take you this gun and give him the other, and you're to fire on anyone who tries to force the stable gate. They're loaded, the pair of 'em, with buckshot. Now, this fellow" —he reached down a third gun—"is loaded blank, and here's another with a bullet in him. I'll take these out to the front."

"But, master, 'tis a hanging matter!"

"And I'll hang, and so shall you, before e'er a one o' these scoundrels sets foot in Steens. Go you off quick and tell Joseph, if there's trouble, to let slip the tether of the shorthorn bull."

* Cattle sheds.

Digitized by Google

Roger crammed a powder-flask into one pocket with a handful of wadding, a bag of bullets into another, took his two guns, and went forth into the courtlage, in time to see a purple-faced man in an ill-fitting Dalmahoy wig climb off his horse and advance to the gate, with half a dozen retainers behind him.

He tried the latch, and, finding it locked, began to shake the gate by the bars.

"Hullo!" said Roger. "And who may you be, making so bold?"

"Is your name Roger Stephen?" the purple-faced man demanded.

"I asked you a question first. Drop shaking my gate and answer it, or else take yourself off."

"And I order you to open at once, sir! I'm the Under-Sheriff of Cornwall, and I've come with a writ of ejectment. You've defied the law long enough, Master Stephen; you've brought me far; and, if you've ever heard the name of William Sandercock, you know he's one to stand no nonsense."

"I never heard tell of you," said Roger, appearing to search his memory; "but speaking off-hand and at first sight, I should say you was either half-drunk or tolerably unlucky

Digitized by Google

in your face." And indeed the Under-Sheriff had set out from Truro at dawn and imbibed much brandy on the road.

"Open the gate!" he foamed.

Roger stepped back and chose his gun. "You'd best lead him away quiet," he advised the men in the road. "You won't? Then I'll give the fool till I count three. One—two—three." And he let off his gun full in the Under-Sheriff's face.

The poor man staggered back, clapped his hand to his jaw, and howled; for the discharge was close enough to scorch his face and singe his wig. Also one eyebrow was burnt, and before he knew if he still retained his sight, his horse had plunged free and was galloping down the road with the whole posse in pursuit, and only too glad of the excuse for running.

"Turn loose the bull!" shouted Roger, swinging round towards the house.

The Under-Sheriff found his legs, and bolted for dear life after his horse.

Digitized by Google

X.

TRAVELLERS in the Great Sahara report many marvels, but none so mysterious and inexplicable as its power of carrying rumour. The desert (say they) is one vast echoing gossip-shop, and a man cannot be killed in the dawn at Mabruk but his death will be whispered before night at Bel Abbas or Amara, and perhaps bruited before the next sun rises on the sea-coast or beside the shores of Lake Chad.

We need not wonder, therefore, that within a few hours the whole of West Cornwall knew how Roger Stephen had defied the Under-Sheriff and fired upon him. Indeed, it is likely enough that in the whole of West Cornwall, at the moment, Roger Stephen was the man least aware of the meaning of the Under-Sheriff's visit and least alive to its consequences. Ever since his father's death that desolate county had been humming with his fame: his wrongs had been discussed at every hearthside, and his probable action. There were cottages so far away as St. Ives

Digitized by Google

where the dispute over Steens had been followed intently through each step in the legal proceedings and the issue of each step speculated on, while in Steens itself the master sat inert and blind to all but the righteousness of his cause—thanks in part to Malachi, but in part also to his own taciturn habit. Men did not gossip with him; they watched him. He was even ignorant that Mrs. Stephen had been pelted with mud in the streets of Penzance, and forced to pack and take refuge in Plymouth.

Next morning Malachi brought word of another small body of men on the road, advancing this time from the direction of Helleston. Three of them (he added) carried guns.

Roger made his dispositions precisely as before, save that he now loaded each of his guns with ball, and again met his visitors at the gate.

"Don't fire, that's a dear man!" cried a voice through the bars; and Roger wondered; for it belonged to a young yeoman from St. Keverne, and its tone was friendly.

"Hey, Trevarthen? What brings you here?" he demanded.

Digitized by Google

"Goodwill to help ye, if you're not above taking it. You've been served like a dog, Stephen; but we'll stand by you, though we go to Launceston jail for it. Open the gate, like a good man."

"You'll swear 'tis no trick you're playing?"

"If we mean aught but neighbourliness, may our bones rot inside of us!" Trevarthen took oath.

Roger opened the padlock and loosened the chain. "I take this very kind of you, friends," he said slowly.

"Why, man, 'tis but the beginning!" the cheerful Trevarthen assured him. "Once we've made the start, you'll find the whole country trooping in; it but wants the signal. Lift your hand, and by nightfall you can have fivescore men at your back: ay, and I'm thinking you'll need 'em; for Sandercock went back no farther than Nansclowan, and there he'll be getting the ear of Sir John, that arrived down from London but yesterday."

"Right's right," growled Roger, "and not even Sir John can alter it."

"Ay, and he won't try nor wish to, if we stand to you and put a firm face on it. But in dealing with Sandercock he deals with the

Digitized by Google

law, and must point to something stronger than you can be, standing here alone. Trust Sir John: he's your friend, and the stouter show we make the more we help him to prove it."

"There's something in what you say," agreed Roger.

"Why, 'tis plain common sense. A fool like Sandercock wants a lesson he can understand, and he'll understand naught but what stares him in his ugly face."

All that day driblets of volunteers arrived at Steens' gate, and at nightfall a party of twoscore from Porthleven, the widow's native village, where it seemed that her conduct was peculiarly detested. Plainly the whole country was roused and boiling over in righteous wrath. Roger, who had brooded so long alone, could hardly credit what he saw and heard, but it touched him to the heart. That day of rallying was perhaps the sweetest in his life. Most of the men carried guns, and some had even loaded themselves with provisions—a flitch of bacon or a bag of potatoes—against a possible siege. They chose their billets in the barns, hay-lofts, granaries, the cider-house, even the empty cattle-stalls, and under the

Digitized by Google

brisk captaincy of Trevarthen fell to work stockading the weak spots in the defence and piercing loopholes in the outer walls. Finding that the slope behind the house commanded an open space in the south-west corner of the yard, they even began to erect a breastwork here, behind which they might defy musketry.

That night fifty-six men supped in Steens kitchen, drank Roger's health, and laughed over their labours. But in the midst of their mirth Roger, on his way to the cellar with a cider-keg under each arm, was intercepted by Malachi, who should have been standing sentry by the yard gate.

"Go back to your post, you careless fool!" commanded Roger, but the old man, beckoning mysteriously, led him out and across the dark yard to a pent beside the gate, and there in the deep shadow he could just discern the figure of a man—a very short man, but erect and somehow formidable even before he spoke.

"Good evening, Stephen!" said the stranger in a low, easy voice.

"Sir John!" Roger drew back apace.

"Ay, and very much at your service. I'm your friend, if you'll believe me, and I don't

Digitized by Google

doubt you've been hardly used; but there's one thing to be done, and you must do it at once. To be short, stop this fooling; and quit."

"'Quit'?" echoed Roger.

"This very night. You've put yourself on the wrong side of the law, or allowed yourself to be put there. You're in the ditch, my friend, and pretty deep. I won't say but I can get you righted in some fashion—you may count on my trying, at least. But you've fired on the Under-Sheriff, the law's after you, and not a hand can I lift until you quit Steens and make yourself scarce for awhile."

"'Quit Steens'?" Roger echoed again with his hand to his forehead. "But, Sir John, you are fresh home from London, and you don't know the rights o' this: 'tis just to bide in Steens and be left quiet that I'm fighting. And here's the whole country to back me, Sir John; over fifty men in my kitchen at this moment, and all ready to burn powder rather than see this wrong committed on me!"

"Yes, yes, so I've just discovered," answered Sir John impatiently; "and there's your worst peril, Stephen. Man, I tell you this makes

Digitized by Google

matters worse; and to-morrow may turn them from worse to incurable. Now, don't argue. I'm your friend, and am risking something at this moment to prove it. At the top of the lane here you'll find a horse: mount him, and ride to Helford Ferry for dear life. Two hundred yards up the shore towards Frenchman's Creek there's a boat made fast, and down off Durgan a ketch anchored. She's bound for Havre, and the skipper will weigh as soon as you're aboard. Mount and ride like a sensible fellow, and I'll walk into your kitchen and convince every man Jack that you have done well and wisely. Reach France and lie quiet for a time, till this storm blows over: the skipper will find lodgings for you and supply you with money, and I shall know your address. Come, what say you?"

"Sir John," Roger stammered hoarsely after a pause, "I—I say it humbly, your house and mine have known one another for long, and my fathers have stood beside yours afore now —and—and I didn't expect this from you, Sir John."

"Why, what ails ye, man?"

"What ails me?" His voice was bitter. "I reckon 'tis an honest man's right that ails

Digitized by Google

me, and ails me cruel. But let God be my witness"—and Roger lifted his fist to the dark night—"they shall take my life from me when I quit Steens, and kill the man in me before I renounce it. Amen!"

"Is that your last word, Stephen?"

"It is, sir."

"Then," said the little man gravely, "as you may need me soon to beg mercy for you, I have a bargain to make. You are fighting with one woman: beware how you fight with two."

"I don't take ye. With what other woman should I fight?"

"When you turned Mrs. Stephen out at door she fled to my wife. And my wife, not liking her, but in common charity, gave her food and lent her a horse to further her to her home. For this she has been attacked, and even her life threatened, in a score of unsigned letters—and in my absence, you understand. She is no coward; but the injustice of it—the cruelty—has told on her health, and I reached home to find her sick in bed. That you have had no hand in this, Stephen, I know well; but it is being done by your supporters."

Digitized by Google

"If I catch the man, Sir John, he shall never write another letter in his life."

"I thank you." Sir John stepped out into the yard and stood while Roger unbarred the folding gates. Then, "I think if mischief comes, you had better not let them take you alive," said he quietly.

"Thank you, Sir John; I won't," was Roger's reply, and so he dismissed another good friend.

Digitized by Google

XI.

SIR JAMES TILLIE, Knight, of Pentillie Castle by Tamar and High Sheriff of Cornwall, was an amiable gentleman of indolent habits and no great stock of brains. On receiving Sandercock's message and instant appeal for help, he cursed his Under-Sheriff for a drunken bungler, and reluctantly prepared to ride West and restore order.

"Piers is a good fellow and a man of parts," he told his wife; "but he gives up too much of his time to parliamenteering, and lets his neighbourhood get out of hand. I protest, my dear, the miners down there are little better than naked savages, and the substantial farmers but a degree better. Here's a fellow, if you please, who answers the law with armed violence—a man, too, of education, as education goes. Sandercock's a coward. On his own showing the gun was loaded blank, and by this time no doubt Master Stephen is quaking at his own temerity and wondering how to save his skin. A few firm words, and he'll be meek as a lamb. What surprises me is that a man

Digitized by Google

of affairs like Piers should lose his head and endorse Sandercock's sweating post; but I always say that, if the gentlemen of England are to maintain their influence, they should live on their own acres." From this it will be seen that Sir James was a prolix rather than a clear thinker.

He took an affectionate leave of his wife, and travelling by easy stages with a single groom for escort, on the third day reached Nansclowan, where Sir John and his lady made him welcome.

"You have ridden ahead of your force?" said Sir John pleasantly.

"My force?"

"How many are you bringing?"

"I don't quite take you. Eh? 'Soldiers'? My dear fellow—an affair of this kind—you surely didn't expect me to make myself ridiculous by marching through Cornwall with a regiment!"

"You mean to say that you've brought none?"

"Oh, to serve a writ on a yeoman!" and Sir James laughed heartily.

"Look here, Tillie, you shall ride over with me to-morrow at daybreak and look at the

Digitized by Google

place. The man has sixty stout farmers at his back. They know that the soldiery has been sent for, and for five days they've been working like niggers. The front of the house is loopholed, and along the rear, which was their weak point, they've opened a trench six feet wide by six deep. By to-night's report they have even begun as outworks two barricades across the high-road, and no traffic may pass without permission."

"It seems to me your part of the world needs looking after," Sir James exclaimed testily.

Sir John ignored this shaft. "You'd better ride over to Pendennis Castle to-morrow and borrow as many men as the garrison can spare you."

"A score should be plenty," said Sir James. "It's astonishing—or so I've always heard—what a few trained men will do against irregulars."

"Treble the number, and you may save bloodshed," was Sir John's advice.

Early next morning, after a cursory inspection of the defences, the Sheriff rode over to Pendennis and held consultation with the Governor. The Governor, who had fifty men in garrison, agreed that twenty would suffice

Digitized by Google

for the job; so twenty were told off, under command of a sergeant, and that same afternoon marched with Sir James to Nansclowan. On their way through Wendron church-town they were hissed and pelted with lumps of turf; but this hint of popular feeling made slight impression on the sanguine Sheriff, who had convinced himself that the resistance of Steens would collapse at the sight of his red-coats.

Having rested them at Nansclowan for the night, he led them forth at dawn and along the high-road to within fifty yards of the barricade which the defenders had drawn across it. There was no thought of tactics. He consulted for a minute with the sergeant, who knew nothing of the strength of the defence except from gossip (which he disbelieved), and the soldiers were ordered to charge.

Sir John Piers, seated on horseback a few paces off, had a mind to ride forward and protest. To his mind the order spelt sheer lunacy. The barrier, to begin with, stood close on twenty feet high, built of rough timbers staked in the ground and densely packed with furze. Nothing could be seen behind it but the top

Digitized by Google

of the second barrier, which at fifty yards distance guarded the approach from Helleston. This nearer one stretched across the road from hedge to hedge, and, though none were perceptible, loopholes there must be and eyes watching every movement of the soldiers.

But Sir John had already this morning proved himself a false prophet. All the way from Nansclowan he had been assuring the Sheriff that the whole country would be advertised of the red-coats' arrival and agog for a fray; that he would have not only the defenders of Steens to deal with but a sympathetic mob outside, and likely enough a large one. Nothing of the sort! They had overtaken indeed a few stragglers on the road: a knot of boys had kept pace with them and halted a furlong behind, climbing the hedges and waiting to see the fun. But Steens itself stood apparently desolate. In the fields around not even a stray group of sightseers could Sir John perceive. It puzzled him completely; and the Sheriff, after demanding in gently satirical accents to be shown the whereabouts of the promised mob, had somewhat pointedly ignored him and consulted with the sergeant alone,

Digitized by Google

The soldiers charged well, holding their fire. And, again to Sir John's flat astonishment, no volley met them. They reached the foot of the barricade and began demolishing it, dragging out the furze-faggots, tearing a passage through.

In less than a minute they had laid open a gap: and with that the mystery was clear. Leaping through, they found themselves in the midst of a cheerful and entirely passive crowd, lining the road in front of Steens' wall, the gate of which had been closed with large baulks of timber from the mines. The crowd numbered perhaps three hundred, and included men, women and children. Groups of them squatted by the roadside or sat in the hedges, quietly sharing out their breakfasts; and one and all, as the Sheriff rode in through the gap on his grey horse, greeted him with laughter, as a set of children might laugh over an innocent practical joke.

Sir James lost his temper, and roughly ordered his soldiers to clear the road. There was no difficulty about this. The men withdrew most obligingly, collecting their breakfast cans, helping their wives and children over the hedge, laughing all the while. They

Digitized by Google

scattered over the fields in front of Steens and sat down again in groups to watch. To disperse them farther with his handful of soldiers would be waste of time, and the Sheriff turned his attention to the house, which faced him grim and silent.

He rode up to the gate, and rattling upon it with his riding-whip, demanded admittance. There was no answer. He looked along the wall to right and left, and for the first time began to understand that the place was strong and his force perhaps inadequate. He could not retreat in the face of ridicule, and so—to gain time—ordered the barricade to be burnt.

The soldiers set to work, and soon had two fine bonfires blazing, and the Sheriff withdrew up the road with his sergeant to consult Sir John, the pair of them a trifle shamefacedly. Sir James tried to ease his own smart by an innuendo or two on the lawlessness of the West and the responsibility of its Justices of the Peace.

Sir John took his sneers very quietly. "My dear Tillie," said he, "I am with you to support the law, and you will remember that I advised your bringing thrice your strength.

Digitized by Google

But I tell you that the law is doing this man a wrong, that all these people are convinced of it, and are innocently scandalised to see me here; and that I at this moment am undoing myself in their esteem, destroying a good feeling of over thirty years' growth, and all for a cause I detest. Get that into your head; and then, if you will, we 'll ride round and examine the defences."

Meanwhile, as if the bonfires had given a signal to half the population of West Cornwall, the roads were beginning to swarm with people. They poured down from the north and up from the south, they spread over the fields and lined the hedges. They carried no weapons, they made no demonstration of anger. There was no attempt to hustle or even to jeer at the red-coats, who stood with grounded arms in a clear space of the roadway and fretted under the slow curious scrutiny of thousands, of eyes. Neighbours nodded and "passed the time of day": acquaintances from the two coasts of the Duchy met, exchanged greetings and enquiries, lit their pipes and strolled about together. It might have been a gathering for a horse-race or a game of hurling, but for the extreme orderliness of the

Digitized by Google

throng and a note of strained expectancy in its buzz of talk; and the likeness was strengthened about nine o'clock, when, in the broad field to the south-west, half a dozen merchants began to erect their sweet-meat booths or "standings" —always an accompaniment of Cornish merry-making.

It was just then that Sir James rode back from his reconnaissance. He had fetched a circuit of Steens without discovering a weak spot, and his temper had steadily risen with the increase of the crowd. His dignity now stood fairly at stake. He moved his soldiers up the road and gave orders to attack the gate.

As they fell into rank, an old man, perched on the hedge hard by, rose lazily and turned to the crowd on the far side. "Here, help me down, some of ye," said he; "I knawed that there Sheriff was a fool the moment I set eyes on 'en."

Sir James heard and rode straight on. If a fool, he was no coward. The soldiers carried axes at their belts, and, dismounting, he led them up to the gate and showed them where to attack. Blow after blow rained on the stout timbers. At length two fell crashing.

And then from a breastwork within, drawn

Digitized by Google

across the flagged pathway of the courtlage, a ragged volley rang out and a dozen bullets swept the opening.

In the crowd across the road many women screamed. Two red-coats dropped, one of them striking the ironwork of the gate with his forehead. A third ran back into the road, stared about him, flung up his arms and tumbled dead. The man who had fallen against the gate lifted himself by its bars, sank again, and was dragged aside by his comrades. The third soldier lay curled in a heap and did not stir.

Across the smoke floating through the entrance Sir James looked at the sergeant. His own coat-cuff had been shorn through by a bullet. The sergeant shook his head.

With a motion of his hand he gave the order to desist. In silence the soldiers picked up their dead and wounded and began their retreat, the crowd pressing forward to watch them—a line of faces peering through the hazel-boughs. It neither cheered nor hissed.

As the enemy drew off, hundreds climbed down into the road and crowded around the pools of blood, gazing but saying little.

Digitized by Google

XII.

THE assailants returned to Nansclowan, where the Sheriff opened his mind to Sir John in a bitter harangue and rode homeward in dudgeon. The soldiers were marched back to Pendennis. And so, to the scandal of the law, for four months the quarrel rested.

It sounds incredible. Sir James reached his house and spent a week in drawing up a report alleging that he and his twenty soldiers had been met by a crowd of over a thousand people, all partisans of Stephen; and that on attempting a forcible entry of Steens he had been murderously fired upon, with the loss of two killed and one wounded. There was not an incorrect statement in the report; and no one could read it without gathering that the whole of West Cornwall was up in arms and in open rebellion against the Crown.

Walpole read it in due course, and sent for Sir John Piers, who had returned to London for a short visit on parliamentary business. The two men (you will remember) were deadly political foes, and Sir John's first thought

Digitized by Google

on receiving the message was, "Walpole is weakening, but he must be hard put to it when he sends for *me*, to bribe me!" However, he waited on the Minister.

Walpole greeted him with a pleasant bow: he had always a soft spot in his heart for the chubby-faced little Cornish baronet who always fought fair. "Let us be friends for ten minutes and talk like men of sense," said he. "Cast your eye over this paper and tell me, for the love of Heaven, what it means."

Sir John read it through and burst out laughing.

"The poor man has lost his head, hey? I guessed so," said Walpole.

"A reed shaken by the wind. As such he advertised an exhibition and the folks came out to see—that is all. To be sure, they feel for this Stephen as an ill-used man; and so for that matter do I."

"You were present. Tell me the whole story, if you will."

So Sir John told it and put it back into its true colours. "As for open rebellion, I'll engage to set down what I've told you in a report which shall be signed by every Justice between Truro and the Land's End."

Digitized by Google

"I don't need it," said Walpole. "But, when all's said, the fellow has defied the law and slaughtered two men. We must make an example of him. You agree, of course?"

"In due time I shall plead for mercy. But of course I agree."

"Well, then, what do you advise?"

"Wait."

"Hey?"

"He won't run. I—well, in fact, I could have shipped him off before this happened, and tried to persuade him to go."

"The deuce you did!"

"Yes, but he refused. And he won't budge now. My advice is—wait, and pick a strong sheriff for next year. There's a neighbour of Tillie's—William Symons, of Hatt—you had best choose someone who doesn't belong to our neighbourhood, for many reasons."

The minister nodded.

"Symons won't drop the business until he has pushed it through."

"I will make a note of his name."

So for four months Roger Stephen remained unmolested, Sir James Tillie having received

Digitized by Google

an answer from London requesting him to hold his hand.

And Sir John's counsel to the minister began to bear fruit even before the new Sheriff took up the case. Until the day of the attack Roger's forces had obeyed him cheerfully. They had volunteered to serve him, and put themselves in jeopardy for his sake. His sense of gratitude had kept him unusually amiable, and when a sullen fit took him his lieutenant Trevarthen had served for an admirable buffer. Trevarthen was always cheerful. But since Roger had tasted blood Trevarthen and Malachi agreed that his temper had entirely changed. He was, in fact, mad; and daily growing madder with confinement and brooding. What they saw was that his temper could no longer be trusted. And while he grew daily more morose, his supporters—left in idleness with the thought of what had been done—began to wish themselves out of the mess. Without excitement to keep their blood warm they had leisure to note Roger's ill humours and discuss them, and to tell each other that he showed very little of the gratitude he certainly owed them. Also, since it was certain that no further attack

Digitized by Google

could be delivered at less than a few hours warning, and since their own affairs called them, the garrison divided itself into "shifts," one mounting guard while the rest visited their homes. And when the men were at home their wives talked to them.

Roger himself never put his nose beyond the defences. In all the years at Helleston a sedentary life had not told on him; but it told on him now, and rapidly. The true cause no doubt lay in his own sullen heart. It is a fact, however, that by this time the state of Steens was insanitary to a high degree and the well water polluted. At little cost of labour the garrison could have tapped and led down one of the many fresh springs on the hillside, but to this no thought was given. The man grew gaunt and livid in colour, and his flesh began to sag inwards at the back of the neck. By the middle of December he was far gone in what is now called Bright's disease, and with this disease the madness in his brain kept pace.

The crisis came with the New Year. Rumours had already reached Steens that the new Sheriff meant business, and was collecting a regiment at Plymouth to march

Digitized by Google

westward as soon as he took up office; also that Mrs. Stephen had travelled down ahead of him and taken lodgings at a farmhouse on the near side of Truro in readiness to witness her triumph. Confident now that no danger threatened before the New Year, all but ten of the garrison—but these ten included the faithful (and unmarried) Trevarthen—had dispersed to their homes to keep Christmas.

Early in the morning of New Year's Day Trevarthen suggested riding into Helleston to purchase fresh meat, their stock of which had run low with the Christmas feasting. He had made many such expeditions—always, however, with an escort of four or five; for although the Justices held their hands, and made no attempt to arrest the dispersed conspirators in their own homes but suffered them there to go about their private occupations, the purchase of victuals for the besieged house was another matter, and rumour had more than once come to Steens that the Helleston constables meant to challenge it by force. So to-day, with Roger's leave, Trevarthen withdrew five of the garrison and rode off, leaving but four men on guard—Roger

Digitized by Google

himself, Malachi, a labourer named Pascoe, and one Hickory Rodda—a schoolmaster from Wendron, whose elder brother, Nathaniel, a small farmer from the same parish, went with the expedition.

The short day passed quietly enough, if tediously. Roger spent the morning in melting down lead for bullets and running it into moulds. Long strips from the roof and even some of the casement lattices had gone to provide his arsenal against the next assault; and at the worst he fully meant to turn to his father's stacks of silver coin in the locked cellar. That afternoon he shut himself up with his Bible, and read until the print hurt his eyes. Then in the waning light he took his hat and started for a stroll around the back defences and out-buildings.

His way led through the kitchen, where Jane, the cook—the only woman left at Steens—was peeling potatoes for the night's supper; and there beside the open hearth sat Hickory Rodda writing by the glow of it, huddled on a stool with a sheet of paper on his knee.

At Roger's entrance the young man—he was scarce twenty, long-legged, overgrown, and in bearing somewhat furtive—slipped a

Digitized by Google

hand over the writing and affected to stare into the fire.

"Hey? What 's that you 're doing?"

"Nun—nothing, Mr. Stephen; nothing particular—that is, I was writing a letter."

"Hand it over."

Hickory rose, upsetting his stool, and began to back away.

"'Tis a private letter I was writing to a friend."

Roger gripped him by the collar, plucked the paper from him, and took it to the door for better light. As he read the dark blood surged up in his neck and face. It was addressed to Lady Piers—a foul letter, full of obscene abuse and threats. Roger cast back one look at its author, and from the doorway shouted into the yard—

"Malachi! Pascoe!"

His voice was terrible. The two men heard it at their posts, and came running.

"Fetch a wain-rope!" He caught Hickory by the collar again, and forced his face up to the window against the red rays of the level sun. "Look on that, you dirt! And look your last on it! Nay, you shall see it once more, as you swing yonder."

Digitized by Google

He pointed across the courtlage to the boughs of an ash tree in the corner, naked against the sky, and with that began to drag the youth through the passage to the front door. Pascoe, not staying to comprehend, had run for a rope. But Malachi and Jane the cook broke into cries of horror.

"Nay, master, nay—you'll do no such thing—you cannot! Let the poor boy go: he's half dead already."

"'Cannot'? I'll see if I cannot!" grunted Roger, and panted with rage. "Open the door, you! He'll hang, I tell you, afore this sun goes down."

"Surely, surely, master—'tis a sin unheard of! The good Lord deliver us; 'tis mad you be to think of it!"

"Mad, am I? P'raps so, but 'twill be an ill madness for this coward." He spurned the dragging body with his foot. "Ah, here's Pascoe! Quick, you: swarm up the tree here, and take a hitch round that branch. See the one I mean?—the third up. Take your hitch by the knot yonder, but climb out first and see if it bears."

"What for?" demanded Pascoe stolidly.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, stifle you and your questions! Can't you see what for?"

"Iss," Pascoe answered, "I reckon I see, and I ben't goin' to do it."

"Look here"— Roger drew a pistol from his pocket, "who's master here—you or I?"

Malachi had run to the gate, and was dragging at the baulks of timber, shouting vain calls for help into the road. Jane had fled screaming through the house and out into the backyard. Pascoe alone kept his head. It seemed to him that he heard the distant tramp of horses.

He looked up towards the bough.

"'Tis a cruel thing to order," said he, "and my limbs be old; but seemin' to me I might manage it."

He began to climb laboriously, rope in hand. As his eyes drew level with the wall's coping he saw to his joy Trevarthen's troop returning along the road, though not from the direction he had expected. Better still, the next moment they saw him on the bough, dark against the red sky. One rider waved his whip.

He dropped the rope as if by accident, crying out at his clumsiness. "Curse your bungling!" yelled Roger, and stooped to

Digitized by Google

pick it up. Pascoe descended again, full of apologies. He had used the instant well. The riders had seen the one frantic wave of his hand, and were galloping down the lane towards the rear of the house.

Had Roger, as the sound of hoofs reached him, supposed it to be Trevarthen's troop returning, he might yet have persisted. But Trevarthen had ridden towards Helleston, and these horsemen came apparently out of the north. His thoughts flew at once to a surprise, and he shouted to Pascoe and Malachi to get their guns and hurry to their posts. The youth at his feet lay in a swoon of terror. He kicked the body savagely and ran, too, for his gun.

Half a minute later Jane came screaming back through the house.

"Oh, master—they 've caught her! They've caught her!"

"Caught whom?"

"Why, Jezebel herself! They've got her in the yard at this moment, and Master Trevarthen's a-bringing her indoors!"

Digitized by Google

XIII.

TREVARTHEN had planned the stroke, and brought it off dashingly. From the Helleston road that morning he and his troop had turned aside and galloped across the moors to the outskirts of the village where Mrs. Stephen lodged. No man dared to oppose them, if any man wished to. They had dragged her from the house, hoisted her on horseback and headed for home unpursued. It was all admirably simple as Trevarthen related it, swelling with honest pride, by the kitchen fire. The woman herself heard the tale, cowering in a chair beside the hearth, wondering what her death would be.

Roger Stephen looked at her. "Ah!"—he drew a long breath.

Then Trevarthen went on to tell—for the wonders of the day were not over—how on their homeward road they had caught up with a messenger from Truro hurrying towards Steens, with word that the new Sheriff was already on the march with a regiment drawn

Digitized by Google

off from the barracks at Plymouth, and had reached Bodmin. In two days' time they might find themselves besieged again.

Roger listened, but scarcely seemed to hear. His eyes were on the woman in the chair, and he drew another long breath.

With that a man came crawling through the doorway—or stooping so low that he seemed to crawl.

It was young Rodda, and he ran to his brother Nathaniel with a sob, and clasped him about the legs.

"Hullo!" cried Nathaniel. "Why, Hick, lad, what's taken 'ee?"

Said Roger carelessly, "I was going to hang him. But I can afford to stretch a point now. Carry the cur to the gate and fling him outside."

"Dang it all, Mr. Stephen," spoke up Nat; "you may be master in your own house, but I reckon Hick and I didn' come here for our own pleasure, and I see no sport in jokin' a lad till you've scared 'en pretty well out of his five senses. Why, see here, friends—he's tremblin' like a leaf!"

"He—he meant it!" sobbed Hickory.

"Meant it? Of course I meant it—the

Digitized by Google

dirty, thievin', letter-writer!" Roger's eyes blazed with madness, and the men by the hearth growled and shrank away from him. He pulled out his pistol and, walking up, presented it at Nat Rodda's head. "Am I captain here, or amn't I? Very well, then: I caught that cur to-day writin' a letter—never you mind of what sort. 'Twas a sort of which I 'd promised that the man I caught writing one should never write a second."

"You 're mighty tender to women, all of a sudden!" Nat—to do him credit—answered up pluckily enough for a man addressing the muzzle of a pistol not two feet from his nose.

"We 'll see about that by-and-by," said Roger grimly. "You 've helped do me a favour, and I 'll cry quits with you and your brother for 't. But I want no more of you or your haveage: yon 's the door—walk!"

"Oh, if that's how you take it"—Nat Rodda shrugged his shoulders and obeyed, his brother at his heels. One or two of the men would have interfered, but Trevarthen checked them. Malachi alone went with the pair to let them forth and bar the gates behind them,

Digitized by Google

"I thank ye, Master Stephen," said Nat, turning in the doorway with a short laugh. "You 've let two necks of your company out o' the halter." He swung round and stepped out into the darkness.

His words smote like the stroke of a bell upon one or two hearts in the kitchen. Trevarthen stepped forward briskly to undo the mischief.

"We'll have forty of the boys back before daylight: Dick Eva's taken a fresh horse to carry round the warning. Get to your posts, lads, and leave Jane here to cook supper. 'Tis 'one and all' now, and fight square; and if Hick Rodda has been sending his dirty threats to Nansclowan and frightening women, he's a good riddance, say I."

The woman in the chair heard all this, and saw Trevarthen draw Roger aside as the men filed out. They were muttering. By-and-by Roger commanded Jane to go and set candles in the parlour. Again they fell to muttering, and so continued until she returned.

Roger Stephen came slowly forward to the hearth.

"Stand up!" he said, and Mrs. Stephen stood up.

Digitized by Google

She could not raise her eyes to his face, but felt that he was motioning her to walk before him. Her limbs seemed weighted with lead, but she obeyed.

They passed out together and into the parlour, where Roger shut the door behind him and locked it.

Digitized by Google

XIV.

A DULL fire burnt on the hearth, banked high upon a pile of white wood-ash. Beside it lay a curiously-shaped ladle with a curl at the end of its iron handle. Two candles stood on the oval table in the centre of the room—the table at which she had been used to sit as mistress. She found her accustomed chair and seated herself. She had no doubt but that this man meant to kill her. In a dull way she wondered how it would be.

Roger, having locked the door, came slowly forward and waited, looking down at her, with his back to the hearth.

By-and-by she lifted her face. "How will you do it?" she asked, very quietly, meeting his eyes.

For the moment he did not seem to understand. Then, drawing in his breath, he laughed to himself—almost without sound, and yet she heard it.

"There's more than one way, if you was woman. But I've been reading the Bible: there's a deal about witches in the Bible,

Digitized by Google

and so I came to understand ye." He stared at her and nodded.

Having once lifted her face, she could eye him steadily. But she made no answer.

He stooped and picked up the ladle at his feet. "You needn't be afraid," he said slowly: "I promised Trevarthen I wouldn't hurt you beforehand. And afterwards—it'll be soon over. D'ye know what I use this for? It's for melting bullets."

He felt in his waistcoat pocket, drew out a crown-piece, held it for a moment betwixt finger and thumb, and dropped it into the ladle.

"They say 'tis the surest way with a witch," said he; then, after a pause, "As for that lawyer-fellow of yours——"

And here he paused again, this time in some astonishment; for she had risen, and now with no fear in her eyes—only scorn.

"Go on," she commanded.

"Well," concluded Roger grimly, "where you fought me as my father's wife he fought for dirty pay, and where you cheated me he lead you into cheating. Therefore, if I caught him, he'd die no such easy death. Isn't that enough?"

Digitized by Google

"I thank you," she said, and her eyes seemed to lighten as they looked into his. "You are a violent man, but not vile—as some. You have gone deep, and you meant to kill me to-morrow—or is it to-night? But I mean to save you from that."

"I think not, mistress."

"I think 'yes,' stepson—that is, if you believe that, killing me, you will kill also your father's child!"

For a moment he did not understand. His eyes travelled over her as she stood erect, stretching out her hands.

Suddenly his head sank. He did not cry out, though he knew—as she knew—that the truth of it had killed him. Not for one moment—it was characteristic of him—did he doubt. In her worst enemy she found, in the act of killing him, her champion against the world.

He groped for the door, unlocked it, and passed out.

In the kitchen he spoke to Jane the cook, who ran and escorted Mrs. Stephen, not without difficulty, up to her own room.

Roger remained as she left him, staring into the fire.

Digitized by Google

XV.

HE served the supper himself, explaining Jane's absence by a lie. Towards midnight the volunteers began to arrive, dropping in by ones and twos; and by four in the morning, when Roger withdrew to his attic to snatch a few hours' sleep, the garrison seemed likely to resume its old strength. The news of the widow's capture exhilarated them all. Even those who had come dejectedly felt that they now possessed a hostage to play off, as a last card, against the law.

That night Roger Stephen, in his attic, slept as he had not slept for months, and awoke in the grey dawn to find Trevarthen shaking him by the shoulder.

"Hist, man! Come and look," said Trevarthen, and led him to the window. Roger rubbed his eyes, and at first could see nothing. A white sea-fog covered the land and made the view a blank; but by-and-by, as he stared, the fog thinned a little, and disclosed, two fields away, a row of blurred white tents, and another row behind it.

Digitized by Google

"How many do you reckon?" he asked quietly.

"Soldiers? I put 'em down at a hundred and fifty."

"And we've a bare forty."

"Fifty-two. A dozen came in from Breage soon after five. They're all posted."

"A nuisance, this fog," said Roger, peering into it. Since the first assault he and his men had levelled the hedge across the road, so that the approach from the fields lay open, and could be swept from the loopholes in the courtlage wall.

"I don't say that," answered Trevarthen cheerfully. "We may find it help us before the day is out. Anyway, there's no chance of its lifting if this wind holds."

"I wonder, now, the fellow didn't try a surprise and attack at once."

"He'll summon you in form, depend on't. Besides, he has to go gently. He knows by this time you hold the woman here, and he don't want her harmed if he can avoid it."

"Ah!" said Roger. "To be sure—I forgot the woman."

While the two men stood meditating a moan sounded in the room below. It seemed to

Digitized by Google

rise through the planking close by their feet.

Trevarthen caught Roger by the arm. "What's that? You haven't been hurting her? You promised——"

"No," Roger interrupted, "I haven't hurt her, nor tried to. She's sick, maybe. I'll step down and have a talk with Jane."

On the landing outside Mrs. Stephen's room the two men shook hands, and Trevarthen hurried down to go the round of his posts in the out-buildings. They never saw one another again. Roger hesitated a moment, then tapped at the door.

After a long pause Jane opened it with a scared face. She whispered with him, and he turned and went heavily down the stairs; another moan from within followed him.

At the front door Malachi met him, his face twitching with excitement. The Sheriff (said he) was at the gate demanding word with Master Stephen.

For the moment Roger did not seem to hear. Then he lounged across the courtlage, fingering and examining the lock of his musket, with ne'er a glance nor a good morning for the dozen men posted beside their loopholes.

Digitized by Google

Another half-dozen waited in the path for his orders; he halted, and told them curtly to march upstairs and man the attic windows, whence across the wall's coping their fire would sweep the approach from the fields; and so walked on and up to the gate, on which the Sheriff was now hammering impatiently.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"Are you Roger Stephen?" answered the Sheriff's voice.

"Roger Stephen of Steens—ay, that's my name."

"Then I command you to open to me, in the name of King George."

"What if I don't?"

"Then 'twill be the worse for you and the ignorant men you're misleading. I'll give you five minutes to consider your answer."

"You may have it in five seconds. What you want you must come and take. Anything more?"

"Yes," said the Sheriff, "I am told that you have taken violent possession of the plaintiff in this suit. I warn you to do her no hurt, and I call upon you to surrender her."

Roger laughed, and through the gate it

Digitized by Google

sounded a sinister laugh enough. "I doubt," said he, "that she can come if she would."

"I warn you also that any agreement or withdrawal of claim which you may wrest from her or force her to sign will under the circumstances be not worth the paper 'tis written on."

Roger laughed again. "I never thought of such a thing. I leave such dirty tricks to your side. Go back with ye, Master Sheriff, and call up your soldiers, if you must."

They tell that the first assault that day came nearest to succeeding. The Sheriff had provided himself with scaling ladders, and, concentrating his attack on the front, ordered his storming party to charge across the road. They came with a rush in close order, and were checked, at the point where the hedge had been levelled, by a withering fire from the loopholes and attic windows. Four men dropped. Two ladders reached the walls, one of them carried by a couple of men, who planted it, and then, finding themselves unsupported, ran back to the main body. Six men with the second ladder reached the wall, dropping a comrade on the way, and

Digitized by Google

climbed it. The first man leapt gallantly down among the defenders and fell on the flags of the courtlage, breaking his ankle. The second, as he poised himself on the coping, was picked off by a shot from the attics and toppled backwards. The others stood by the foot of the ladder bawling for support.

But the momentary dismay of the main body had been fatal. Each man at the loop-holes had two guns, and each pair an attendant to reload for them. Before the soldiers could pull themselves together a second volley poured from the loop-holes, and again three men dropped. One or two belated shots followed the volley, and a moment later the captain in command, as he waved his men forward, let drop his sword, clenched his fists high above him, and fell headlong in the roadway across their feet. Instinct told them that the course to which he had been yelling them on was, after all, the safest—to rush the road between two volleys and get close under the wall. Once there, they were safe from the marksmen, who could not depress their guns sufficiently to take aim. And so, with a shout, at length they carried the road; but too late to recover the first ladder, the

Digitized by Google

foot of which swung suddenly high in air. This ladder was a tall one, overtopping the wall by several feet; and Pascoe, remembering the wain-rope lying beneath the ash tree, had run for it, cleverly lassoed its projecting top, and, with two men helping, jerked it high and dragged it inboard with a long slide and a crash.

There were now about a hundred soldiers at the foot of the wall, and the fate of Steens appeared to be sealed, when help came as from the clouds. Throughout the struggle forms had been flitting in the rear of the soldiers. The fog had concealed from the Sheriff that he was fighting, as his predecessor had fought, within a ring of spectators many hundreds in number; and to-day not a few of these spectators had brought guns. It is said that in the hottest of the fray Trevarthen broke out from the rear of Steens and marshalled them. Certain it is that no sooner were the soldiers huddled beneath the wall than a bullet sang down the road from the north, then another, then a volley; and as they faced round in panic on this flanking fire, another volley swept up the road from the south and took them in the rear.

Digitized by Google

They could see no enemy. Likely enough the enemy could not see them. But, packed as they were, the cross-fire could not fail to be deadly. The men in the courtlage had drawn back towards the house as the ladder began to sway above the wall. They waited, taking aim, but no head showed above the coping. They heard, and wondered at, the firing in the road: then, while still they waited, one by one the ladders were withdrawn.

The soldiers, maddened by the fire, having lost their captain, and being now out of hand, parted into two bodies and rushed, the one up the other down the road, to get at grips with their new assailants. But it is ill chasing an invisible foe, and a gun is easily tossed over a hedge. After pursuing maybe for quarter of a mile they met indeed two or three old men, innocent-looking but flushed about the face, sauntering towards the house with their hands in their pockets; and because their hands when examined were black and smelt of gunpowder, these innocent-looking old men went back in custody to the post where the bugles were sounding the recall. The soldiers turned back sullenly enough, but presently quickened their pace as a yellow glare in the

Digitized by Google

fog gave the summons a new meaning. Their camp was ablaze from end to end!

This was a bitter pill for the Sheriff. He had come in force, determined to prove to the rebels that they had a stronger man than Sir James Tillie to deal with, and he had failed even more ignominiously. He cursed the inhabitants of West Cornwall, and he cursed the fog; but he was not a fool, and he wasted no time in a wild-goose chase over an unknown country where his men could not see twenty yards before them. Having saved what he could of the tents and trodden out the embers, he consulted with the young lieutenant now in command and came to two resolutions: to send to Pendennis Castle for a couple of light six-pounders, and, since these could not arrive until the morrow, to keep the defence well harassed during the remaining hours of daylight, not attempting a second assault in force, but holding his men in shelter and feeling around the position for a weak point.

The day had passed noon before these new dispositions were planned. Posting ten men and a corporal to guard the charred remains of the camp, and two small bodies to patrol the road east and west of the house and to keep a

Digitized by Google

portion of the defence busy in the courtlage, the lieutenant led the remainder of his force through an orchard divided from the south end of the house by a narrow lane, over which a barn abutted. Its high blank wall had been loopholed on both floors and was quite unassailable, but its roof was of thatch. And as he studied it, keeping his men in cover, a happy inspiration occurred to him. He sent back to the camp for an oil-can and a parcel of cotton wadding, and by three o'clock had opened a brisk fire of flaming bullets on the thatch. Within twenty minutes the marksmen had it well ignited. Behind and close above it rose a gable of the house itself, with a solitary window overlooking the ridge, and their hope was that the wind would carry the fire from one building to another.

Thatch well sodden with winter's rain does not blaze or crackle. Dense clouds of smoke went up, and soon small lines of flame were running along the slope of the roof, dying down, and bursting forth anew. By the light of them, through the smoke, the soldiers saw a man at the window above, firing, reloading, and firing again. They sent many a shot at the window; but good aim from their cover

Digitized by Google

was impossible, and the loopholes of the barn itself spat bullets viciously and kept the assault from showing its head.

The man at the window—it was Roger Stephen — exposed himself recklessly even when the fire from the loopholes ceased, as to the lieutenant's surprise it did quite suddenly.

For a minute or so the thatch burned on in silence. Then from within the building came the sound of an axe crashing, stroke on stroke, upon the posts and timbers of the roof. Some madman was bringing down the barn-roof upon him to save the house. The man at the window went on loading and firing.

The soldiers themselves held their breath, and almost let it go in a cheer when, with a rumble and a thunderous roar, the roof sank and collapsed, sending up one furious rush of flame in a column of dust. But as the dust poured down the flame sank with it. The house was saved. They looked about them and saw the light fading out of the sky, and the lieutenant gave the order to return to camp. The man at the window sent a parting shot after them.

And with that ended the great assault,

Digitized by Google

But scarcely had the Sheriff reached camp when a voice came crying after him through the dusk, and, turning, he spied a figure waving a white rag on a stick. The messenger was old Malachi, and he halted at a little distance, but continued to wave his flag vigorously.

"Hey?" bawled back the Sheriff. "What is it?"

"Flag o' truce!" bawled Malachi in answer. "Master's compliments, and if you've done for the day he wants to know if you've such a thing as a surgeon."

"Pretty job for us if we hadn't," growled the Sheriff. "I keep no surgeons for lawbreakers. How many wounded have you?"

"Ne'er a man amongst us, 'cept poor Jack Trevarthen, and he's dead. 'Tisn' for a man, 'tis for a woman. Mistress Stephen's crying out, and the master undertakes if you send a surgeon along he shall be treated careful."

So back with Malachi went the regimental surgeon, who had done his work with the wounded some hours before. Roger Stephen met him at the side wicket, and, leading him indoors, pointed up the stairs. "When 'tis

Digitized by Google

over," said he, "you 'll find me yonder in the parlour." He turned away, and upstairs the young doctor went.

Roger entered the parlour and shut the door behind him. The room was dark and the hearth cold; but he groped for a chair and sat for two hours alone, motionless, resting his elbows on the table and his chin on his clasped, smoke-begrimed hands. He was listening. Now and again a moan reached him from the room overhead. From the kitchen came the sound of voices cursing loudly at intervals, but for the most part muttering—muttering. . .

The cursers were those who came in from their posts to snatch a handful of supper, and foraged about in larder and pantry demanding to know what had become of Jane. Jane was upstairs. . .

The mutterers were men who had abandoned their posts to discuss the situation by the kitchen fire. A brisk assault just now could hardly have missed success. Trevarthen's death had demoralised the garrison, and these men by the fire were considering the risk to their necks. Roger knew what they were discussing. By rising and stepping into the kitchen he could at least have shamed

Digitized by Google

them back to duty. He knew this full well, yet he sat on motionless. . .

A sound fetched him to his feet—a child's wail.

He stood up in the darkness lifting his arms . . . as a man might yawn and stretch himself awaking from a long dream.

Someone tapped at the door, turned the handle, and stood irresolutely there peering into the darkness.

"Yes?" said Roger, advancing.

"Ah!" it was the surgeon's voice—"I beg your pardon, but finding you in darkness—— Yes, it's all right—a fine boy, and the mother, I should say, doing well. Do you wish to go up?"

"God forbid!" said Roger, and led him to the kitchen, where the whisperers started up at his entrance. In the middle of the room, on a board across two trestles, lay something hidden by a white sheet—Trevarthen's body, recovered from the ruins of the barn.

"He was my friend," said Roger simply, pausing by the corpse. Then he turned with a grim smile on the malcontents. "Where's the brandy?" he asked. "The doctor 'll have a drink afore he turns out into the night."

Digitized by Google

"No, I thank you, Mr. Stephen," said the young surgeon.

"Won't take it from me? Well, I thank ye all the same." He led his guest forth, let him out by the wicket, and returned to the kitchen.

"Lads," said he, "the night's foggy yet. You may slip away to your homes, if you go quiet. Step and tell the others, and send Malachi to me. I—I thank ye, friends, but, as you've been arguing to yourselves, the game's up; we won't stand another assault to-morrow."

They filed out and left him, none asking—as Trevarthen would have asked—concerning his own safety. By Trevarthen's body Malachi found him standing; and again, and in the same attitude, found him standing by it a quarter of an hour later, when, having muffled the horses' hoofs in straw, he returned to announce that all was ready, and the lane clear towards the moors. In so short a time the whole garrison had melted away.

"He was my friend," said Roger again, looking down on the sheet, and wondered why this man had loved him. Indeed, there was no explanation except that Trevarthen had been just Trevarthen.

Digitized by Google

He followed Malachi, wondering the while if he had ever thrown Trevarthen an affectionate word. Yet this man had cheerfully given up life for him, as he, Roger Stephen, was at this moment giving up more than life for a woman he hated.

He walked forth from Steens, leading his horse softly. At the foot of the lane he mounted, looked back in the darkness, and lifted a fist against the sky.

Then they headed eastward, and rode, Malachi and he, over the soundless turf and through the fog, breasting the moor together.

A little after midnight, on the high ground, they reined up, straining their ears at a rumbling sound borne up to them from the valley road below—the sound (though they knew it not) of two cannon ploughing through the mire towards Steens.

At eight o'clock next morning one of these guns opened fire, and with its first shot ripped a breach through the courtlage wall. There came no answer. When the Sheriff, taking courage, rode up to summon the house, its garrison consisted of two women and one sleeping babe.

Digitized by Google

XVI.

FOUR days later the fugitives were climbing a slope on the south-eastern fringe of Dartmoor. They mounted through a mist as dense almost as that in which they had ridden forth—a cloud resting on the hill's shoulder. But a very few yards above them the sky was blue, and to the south of them, had their eyes been able to pierce the short screen of vapour, the country lay clear for mile upon mile, away beyond Ashburton to Totnes, and beyond Totnes to Dartmouth and the Channel.

Roger Stephen's face was yellow with disease and hunger; he could hardly sit in his saddle. He panted, and beads stood out on his forehead as though he felt every effort of his straining horse. Malachi's face was white but expressionless. Life had never promised him much, and for him the bitterness of death was easily passed.

By-and-by, as a waft of wind lifted the cloud's ragged edge, his eyes sought the long slopes below, and then went up to a mass of

Digitized by Google

dark granite topping the white cumulus above, and frowning over it out of the blue.

"Better get down here," he said.

Roger rode on unheeding.

"Better get down here, master," he repeated in a wheedling voice, and, dismounting, took Roger's rein. Roger obeyed at once, almost automatically. As his feet felt earth he staggered, swayed, and dropped forward into Malachi's arms.

"Surely! Surely!" the old man coaxed him, and took his arm. They left their horses to graze, and mounted the slope, the old man holding the younger's elbow, and supporting him. Each carried a gun slung at his back.

They reached the foot of the tor, and found a granite stairway, rudely cut, winding to its summit. Roger turned to Malachi with questioning eyes, like a child's.

"Surely! Surely!" repeated Malachi, glancing behind him. His eye had caught a glint of scarlet far down on the uncoloured slope.

With infinite labour and many pauses they climbed the stairway together, the old man always supporting the younger and coaxing

Digitized by Google

him. In the broad stand of granite at the summit the rains had worn a basin, shallow, ample to recline in, even for a man of Roger's stature. Here Malachi laid him down, first drawing the gun-sling gently off his shoulders. Roger said nothing, but lay and gasped, staring up into the blue sky.

Malachi examined the two guns, looked to their locks, and, fishing in his pockets, drew forth a powder-horn and a bag of bullets. These he laid with the guns on the granite ledge before him, and, crawling forward on his stomach, peered over.

The cloud had drifted by. It was as he expected—the soldiers were climbing the slope. For almost half an hour he kept his position, and behind him Roger muttered on, staring up at the sky. Amid the mutterings from time to time the old man heard a curse. They sank at length to a mumble, senseless, rambling on and on, without intelligible words.

Malachi put a hand out for a gun, raised himself deliberately on his elbow, and fired. He did not look to see if his shot had told, but turned at once and, in the act of fitting the cloth to his ramrod, looked anxiously at his master. Even the mumbling had now

Digitized by Google

ceased, but still Roger gazed fixedly up into the sky and panted. He had not heeded the report.

Malachi reloaded carefully, stretched out his hand upon the second gun, and fired again. This time he watched his shot, and noted that it had found its man. He turned to his master with a smile, reaching out his hand for the reloaded gun, picked it up, laid it down again, and felt in his pocket.

"No good wasting time," he muttered.

He drew forth pipe and tinder-box, hunted out the last few crumbs of tobacco at the bottom of his pocket, and lit up, still keeping his eyes on Roger as he smoked.

A voice challenged far down the slope. He crawled to his master's side.

"There's one thing we two never could abide, master dear, could we? and that was folks interruptin'."

He took up the reloaded gun again, fired his last shot, and sat puffing.

Minutes passed, and then once more a voice challenged angrily from the foot of the tor. Malachi leaned across, closed the eyes that still stared up implacably, and arose, knocking out the ashes of his pipe against his boot-heel,

Digitized by Google

"Right you are!" he sang down bravely. "There be two men up here, and one was a good man; but he's dead, and the law that killed 'en takes naught from me but a few poor years that be worthless without 'en. Come ye up, friends, and welcome!"

Digitized by Google

The Horror on the Stair

Particulars concerning the end of Mistress Catherine Johnstone, late of Givens, in Ayrshire; from a private relation made by the young woman Kirstie Maclachlan to the Reverend James Souttar, A.M., Minister of the Parish of Wyliebank, and by him put into writing.

I HAD been placed in my parish of Wyliebank about a twelvemonth before making acquaintance with Mr. Johnstone, the minister at Givens, twelve miles away. This would be in the year 1721, and from that until the date of his death (which happened in the autumn of 1725) I saw him in all not above a dozen times. To me he appeared a douce, quiet man, commonplace in the pulpit and not over-learned, strict in his own behaviour, methodical in his duties, averse from gossip of all kinds, having himself a great capacity for silence, whereby he seemed perhaps wiser than he was, but not

Digitized by Google

(I think) more charitable. He had greatly advanced his fortunes by marriage.

This marriage made him remarkable, who else had passed as quite ordinary; but not for the money it brought him. Of his wife I knew no more than my neighbours. She was a daughter of Sir John Telfair, of Balgarnock, a gentleman of note in Renfrewshire; and the story ran concerning her that, at the age of sixteen, having a spite against one of the maidservants, she had pretended to be bewitched and persecuted by the devil, and upheld the imposture so cleverly, with rigors, convulsions, foaming at the mouth and spitting forth of straws, chips and cinders, pins and bent nails, that the Presbytery ordained a public fast against witchcraft, and by warrant of Privy Council a Commission visited Balgarnock to take evidence of her condition. In the presence of these Commissioners, of whom the Lord Blantyre was president, the young lady flatly accused one Janet Burns, her mother's still-room maid, of tormenting her with aid of the black art, and for witness showed her back and shoulders covered with wales, some blue and others freshly bleeding; and further, in the midst of their

Digitized by Google

interrogatories cast herself into a trance, muttering and offering faint combat to divers unseen spirits, and all in so lifelike a manner that, notwithstanding they could discover no evident proof of guilt, these wise gentry were overawed and did commit the woman Janet Burns to take her trial for witchcraft at Paisley. There, poor soul, as she was escorted to the prison, the town rabble met her with sticks and stones and closed the case; for on her way a cobble cast by some unknown hand struck her upon the temple, and falling into the arms of the guard, she never spoke after, but breathed her last breath as they forced her through the mob to the prison gates.

This was the tale told to me; and long before I heard it the reprobation of the vulgar had swung back from Janet Burns and settled upon her accuser. Certain it was that swiftly upon the woman's murder—as I may well call it—Miss Catherine made a recovery, nor was thereafter troubled with fits, swoons or ailments calling for public notice. Indeed, she was shunned by all, and lived (as well as I could discover) in complete seclusion for twenty years, until the minister of Givens sought her out with an offer of marriage.

Digitized by Google

By this time she was near forty; a thin, hard-featured spinster, dwelling alone with her mother the Lady Balgarnock. Her two younger sisters had married early—the one to Captain Luce, of Dunragit in Wigtownshire, the other to a Mr. Forbes, of whom I know nothing save that his house was in Edinburgh: and as they had no great love for Miss Catherine, so they neither sought her company nor were invited to Balgarnock. Her father, Sir John, had deceased a few months before Mr. Johnstone presented himself.

He made a short courtship of it. The common tongues accused him (as was to be expected) of coming after her money; whereas she and her old mother lived a cat-and-dog life together, and she besides was of an age when women will often marry the first man that offers. But I now believe, and (unless I mistake) the history will show, that the excuse vulgarly made for her did not touch the real ground of her decision. At any rate, she married him and lived from 1718 to 1725 in the manse at Givens, where I made her acquaintance.

I had been warned what to expect. The parishioners of Givens seldom had sight of

Digitized by Google

her, and set it down to pride and contempt of her husband's origin. (He had been a weaver's son from Falkirk, who either had won his way to the Marischal College of Aberdeen by strength of will and in defiance of natural dulness, or else had started with wits but blunted them in carving his way thither.) She rarely set foot beyond the manse garden, the most of her time being spent in a roomy garret under the slates, where she spun a fine yarn and worked it into thread of the kind which is yet known as "Balgarnock thread," and was invented by her or by her mother—for accounts differ as to this. I have beside me an advertisement clipped from one of the newspapers of twenty years ago, which says: "The Lady Balgarnock and her eldest daughter having attained to great perfection in making whitening and twisting of SEWING THREED which is as cheap and white, and known by experience to be much stronger than the Dutch, to prevent people's being imposed upon by other Threed which may be sold under the name of Balgarnock Threed, the Papers in which the Lady Balgarnock at Balgarnock, or Mrs. Johnstone her eldest daughter, at Givens, do put up their Threed

Digitized by Google

shall, for direction, have thereupon their Coat of Arms, '*Azure*, a ram's head caboshed *or*.' Those who want the said Threed, which is to be sold from fivepence to six shillings per ounce, may write to the Lady Balgarnock at Balgarnock, or Mrs. Johnstone at Givens, to the care of the Postmaster at Glasgow; and may call for the same in Edinburgh at John Seton, Merchant, his shop in the Parliament Close, where they will be served either in Wholesale or Retail, and will be served in the same manner at Glasgow, by William Selkirk, Merchant, in Trongate."

In this art, then, the woman spent most of her days, preparing the thread with her own hands and bleaching her materials on a large slate raised upon brackets in the window of her garret. And, if one may confess for all, glad enough were Mr. Johnstone's guests when this wife of his rose from the table and departed upstairs. For a colder, more taciturn and discomfortable hostess could not be conceived. She would scarcely exchange a word through the meal—no, not with her husband, though he watched and seemed to forestall her wants with a tender officiousness. To see her seated there in black (which was her

Digitized by Google

only wear), with her back to the window, her eyes on the board, and, as it seemed, the shadow of a long-past guilt brooding about her continually, gave me a feeling as of cold water dripping down the spine. And even the husband, though he pretended to observe nothing, must have known my relief when she withdrew and left us with the decanters.

Now I had tholed this penance, maybe, a dozen times, and could never win a speech from Mrs. Johnstone, nor a look, to show that she regarded me while present or remembered me after I had gone. So you may think I was surprised one day when the minister came riding over with word that his wife wanted a young girl for companion and to help her with the spinning, and had thought of me as likely to show judgment in recommending one. The girl must be sixteen, or thereabout, of decent behaviour and tractable, no gadder or lover of finery, healthy, able to read, an early riser, and, if possible, devout. For her parentage I need not trouble myself, if I knew of a girl suitable in these other respects.

It happened that I had of late been contriving some odd work about the manse for the girl Kirstie Maclachlan, not that the work

Digitized by Google

needed doing, but to help her old mother; for we had no assessment for the poor, and the Session was often at its wits' end to provide relief, wherein as a man without family cares I could better assist than some of my neighbours. The girl's mother was a poor feckless creature who had left Wyliebank in her youth to take service in Glasgow, and there, beguiled at first by some villain, had gone from bad to worse through misguidance rather than wantonness, and at last crept home to her native parish to starve, if by starving she could save her child—then but an infant—from the city and its paths of destruction. This, in part by her own courage, and in part by the help of the charitable, she had managed to do, and lived to see Kirstie grow to be a decent, religiously minded young woman. Nor did the lass want for good looks in a sober way, nor for wit when it came to reading books; but in speech she was shy beyond reason, and would turn red and stammer if a stranger but addressed her. I think she could never forget that her birth had been on the wrong side of the blanket, and, supposing folks to be pitying her for it, sought to avoid them and their kindness.

Digitized by Google

It was Kirstie, then, whom I ventured to commend to Mr. Johnstone for his lady's requirements; and after some talk between us the good man sent for her and was satisfied with her looks and the few answers which, in her stammering way, she managed to return to his questions. When he set off homeward it was on the understanding that she should follow him to Givens on foot, which she did the next day with her stock of spare clothes in a kerchief. Nor, although I twice visited Givens during her service there, did I ever see her at the manse, but twice only before she returned to us with the tale I am to set down—the first time at the burying of her mother here in Wyliebank, and the second at Givens, when I was called thither to inter her master who died very suddenly by the bursting of a blood-vessel in the brain. After that she went to live with the widow in lodgings in Edinburgh; and from her, some fifteen months later, I received the news, in a letter most neatly indited, that Mrs. Johnstone had perished by her own hand, and a request to impart it to all in this parish whom it might concern. The main facts she told me then in writing, but the circumstances

Digitized by Google

(being ever a sensible girl) she kept to transmit to me by word of mouth, rightly judging that the public enquiry had no business with them.

It seems, then, that Kirstie's first introduction to Mrs. Johnstone was none too cheerful; indeed, it came near to scaring her out of her senses. She arrived duly at Givens shortly before five of the afternoon (a warm day in June) and went straight to the manse, where the door was opened to her by Mr. Johnstone, who had seen her from the parlour window. He led the way back to the parlour, and, after a question or two upon her journey, took her up the main stairs to the landing. Here he halted and directed her up a narrow flight to her garret, which lay off to the right, at the very top.

The door stood ajar, and facing it was another door, wide open, through which a ray of the evening sun slanted across the stair-head. Kirstie, with her bundle in one hand and the other upon the hasp, turned to look down upon the minister, to make sure she was entering the right chamber. He stood at the foot of the stairs, and his eyes were following her (as she thought) with a very curious

Digitized by Google

expression; but before he could nod she happened to throw a glance into the room opposite, and very nearly dropped her bundle.

Yet there was nothing to be scared at; merely the figure of an elderly woman in black bent over her spinning-wheel there in the dim light. It was Mrs. Johnstone, of course, seated at her work; but it came upon the girl with suddenness, like an apparition, and the fright, instead of passing, began to take hold of her as the uncanny woman neither spoke nor looked up. The room about her was bare, save for some hanks of yarn littered about the boards and a great pile of it drying on a tray by the window. The one ray of sunlight seemed to pass over this without searching the corners under the sloping roof, and fell at Kirstie's feet.

She has told me that she must have stood there for minutes with her heart working like a pump. When she looked down the stair again the minister was gone. She pulled her wits together, stepped quickly into her own room, and, having closed the door behind her, sat down on the bed to recover.

Being a lass of spirit, she quickly reasoned herself out of this foolishness, rose, washed,

Digitized by Google

changed her stockings, put off her shawl for cap and apron, and—albeit in trepidation—presented herself once more at the door of Mrs. Johnstone's garret.

"Please you, mistress," she managed to say, "I am Kirstie Maclachlan, the new maid from Wyliebank."

Mrs. Johnstone looked up and fixed her with a pair of eyes that (she declared) searched her through and through; but all she said was, "The minister tells me you can read."

"Yes, mistress."

"What books have you brought?"

Kirstie, to be sure, had two books in her bundle—a Bible and John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, the both of them gifts from me. Mrs. Johnstone commanded her to fetch the second and start reading at once; "for," she explained, not unkindly, "it will suit you best, belike, to begin with something familiar; and if I find you read well and pleasantly, we will get a book from the manse library."

So the girl found a stool in the corner, and, seating herself near the window, began to read by the waning light. She had, indeed, an agreeable voice, and I had taken pains to teach her. She read on and on, gathering

Digitized by Google

courage, yet uncertain if Mrs. Johnstone approved; who said no word, but continued her spinning until darkness settled down on the garret and blurred the print on the page.

At last she looked up, and, much to Kirstie's surprise, with a sigh. "That will do, girl, you read very nicely. Run down and find your supper, and after that the sooner you get to bed the better. We rise early in this house. To-morrow I will put you in the way of your duties."

Downstairs Kirstie met the minister who had been taking a late stroll in the garden and now entered by the back-door. He halted under the lamp in the passage. "Well," he asked, "what did she say?"

"She bade me get my supper and be early in the morning," Kirstie answered simply.

For some reason this seemed to relieve him. He hung up his hat and stood pulling at his fingers until the joints cracked, which was a trick with him. "She needs to be soothed," he said. "If you read much with her, you must come to me to choose the books; yet she must think she has chosen them herself. We must manage that somehow. The great thing is to keep her mind soothed."

Digitized by Google

Kirstie did not understand. A few minutes later as she went up the stairs to her room the door opposite still remained open. All was dark within, but whether or not Mrs. Johnstone sat there in the darkness she could not tell.

The next morning she entered on her duties, which were light enough. Indeed, she soon suspected that her mistress had sought a companion rather than a servant, and at first had much to-do to find employment. Soon, however, Mrs. Johnstone took her into confidence, and began to impart the mysteries of whitening and twisting the famous Balgarnock thread; and so by degrees, without much talk on either side, there grew a strange affection betwixt them. Sure, Kirstie must have been the first of her sex to whom the strange woman showed any softness; and on her part the girl asserts that she was attracted from the first by a sort of pity, without well knowing for what her pity was demanded. The minister went no farther with his confidences: he could see that Kirstie suited, and seemed resolved to let well alone. The wife never spoke of herself; and albeit, if Kirstie's reading happened to touch on the sources of

Digitized by Google

Christian consolation, she showed some eagerness in discussing them, it was done without any personal or particular reference. Yet, even in those days, Kirstie grew to feel that terror was in some way the secret of her mistress's strangeness; that for the present the poor woman knew herself safe and protected from it, but also that there was ever a danger of that barrier falling—whatever it might be—and leaving her exposed to some enemy, from the thought of whom her soul shrank.

I do not know how Kirstie became convinced that, whoever or whatever the enemy might be, Mr. Johnstone was the phylactery. She herself could give no grounds for her conviction beyond his wife's anxiety for his health and well-being. I myself never observed it in a woman, and if I had, should have set it down to ordinary wifely concern. But Kirstie assures me, first, that it was not ordinary, and, secondly, that it was not at all wifely—that Mrs. Johnstone's care of her husband had less of the ministering unselfishness of a woman in love than of the eager concern of a gambler with his stake. The girl (I need not say) did not put it thus, yet this in effect was her

Digitized by Google

report. And she added that this anxiety was fitful to a degree: at times the minister could hardly take a walk without being fussed over and forced to change his socks on his return; at others, and for days together, his wife would resign the care of him to Providence, or at any rate to Fate, and trouble herself not at all about his goings-out or his comings-in, nor whether he wore a great-coat or not, nor if he returned wet to the skin and neglected to change his wear.

Well, the girl was right, as was proved on the afternoon when Mr. Johnstone, taking his customary walk upon the Kilmarnock road, fell and burst a blood-vessel, and was borne home to the manse on a gate. The two women were seated in the garret as usual when the crowd entered the garden; and with the first sound of the bearers' feet upon the path, which was of smooth pebbles compacted in lime, Mrs. Johnstone rose up, with a face of a sudden so grey and terrible that Kirstie dropped the book from her knee.

"It has come!" said the poor lady under her breath, and put out a hand as if feeling for some stick of furniture to lean against.

Digitized by Google

"It has come!" she repeated aloud, but still hoarsely; and with that she turned to the lass with a most piteous look, and "Oh, Kirstie, girl," she cried, "you won't leave me? I have been kind to you—say you won't leave me!"

Before Kirstie well understood, her mistress's arms were about her and the gaunt woman clinging to her body and trembling like a child. "You will save me, Kirstie? You will live here and not forsake me? There is nobody now but you!" she kept crying over and over.

The girl held her firmly with a grasp above the elbows to steady her and allay the trembling, and, albeit dazed herself, uttered what soothing words came first to her tongue. "Why, mistress, who thinks of leaving you? Not I, to be sure. But let me get you to bed, and in an hour you will be better of this fancy, for fancy it must be."

"He is dead, I tell you," Mrs. Johnstone insisted, "and they are bringing him home. Hark to the door—that was never your master's knock—and the voices!"

She was still clinging about Kirstie when the cook came panting up the stairs and

Digitized by Google

into the room with a white face; for it was true, and the minister had breathed his last between the garden gate and his house door.

As I have said, I rode over from Wyliebank four days later to read the burial service. The widow was not to be seen, and of Kirstie, who ever hid herself from the sight of strangers, I caught but a glimpse. She did not follow the coffin, but remained upstairs (as I suppose) comforting her mistress. The other poor distracted servants, between tears and ignorance, made but a sorry business of entertaining the company, so that but half a dozen at most cared to return to the house, of whom I was not one.

The manse had to be vacated, and within a week or two I heard that Mrs. Johnstone had sold a great part of her furniture, dismissed all her household but Kirstie, and retired to a small cottage a little further up the street and scarcely a stone's-throw from the manse.

"She made," says Kirstie, "little show of mourning for her husband, nor for months afterwards did she return to the terror she had

Digitized by Google

shown that day in the garret, yet I am sure that from the hour of his death she never knew peace of mind. She had fitted up a room in the cottage with her wheel and bleaching boards, and we spent all our time in reading or thread-making. At night my cot would be strewn in her bedroom, and we slept with a candle burning on the table between us; but once or twice I woke to see her laid on her side, or resting on her elbow, with her face towards me and her eyes fixed upon mine across the light. This used to frighten me, and she must have seen it, for always she would stammer that I need not be alarmed, and beg me to go to sleep again like a good child. I soon came to see that, whatever her own terror might be, she had the utmost dread of my catching it, and that her hope lay in keeping me cheerful. Since I had nothing on my mind at that time, and knew of no cause for fear, I used to sleep soundly enough; but I begin to think that my mistress slept scarcely at all. I cannot remember once waking without finding her awake and her eyes watching me as I say.

"She herself would not set foot outside the cottage for weeks together, and if by chance

Digitized by Google

we did take a walk it would be towards sunset, when the fields were empty and the folk mostly gathered on the green at the far end of the village. There was a footpath led across these fields at the back of the cottage, and here at such an hour she would sometimes consent to take the air, leaning on my arm; but if any wayfarer happened to come along the path I used to draw her aside into the field, where we made believe to be gathering of wild flowers. She had a dislike of meeting strangers and a horror of being followed; the sound of footsteps on the path behind us would drive her near crazy."

I think 'twas this frequent pretence of theirs to be searching for wild flowers which brought the suspicion of witchcraft upon them among the population of Givens. The story of the woman's youth was remembered against her, if obscurely. Folks knew that she had once been afflicted or possessed by an evil spirit, and from this 'twas a short step to accuse her of gathering herbs at nightfall for the instruction of Kirstie in the black art. In the end the rumour drove them from Givens, and in this manner.

Though the widow so seldom showed herself

Digitized by Google

abroad, in her care for Kirstie's cheerfulness she persuaded the girl to take a short walk every morning through the village. In truth Kirstie hated it. More and more as her mistress clung to her she grew to cling to her mistress; it seemed as if they two were in partnership against the world, and the part of protector which she played so watchfully and courageously for her years took its revenge upon her. For what makes a child so engaging as his trust in the fellow-creatures he meets and his willingness to expect the best of them? To Kirstie, yet but a little way past childhood, all men and women were possible enemies, to be suspected and shunned. She took her walk dutifully because Mrs. Johnstone commanded it, and because shops must be visited and groceries purchased; but it was penance to her, and she would walk a mile about to avoid a knot of gossips or to wile the time away until a shop emptied.

But one day in the long main street she was fairly caught by a mob of boys hunting and hooting after a negro man. They paid no heed to Kirstie, who shrank into a doorway as he passed down the causeway—a seaman, belike, trudging to Irvine or Saltcoats. He

Digitized by Google

seemed by his gait to be more than half drunk, and by the way he shook his stick back at the boys and cursed them; but they would not be shaken off, and in the end he took refuge in the "Leaping Fish," where his tormentors gathered about the doorway and continued their booing until the landlord came forth and dispersed them.

By this time Kirstie had bolted from the doorway and run home. She said nothing of her adventure to Mrs. Johnstone; but in the dusk of the evening a riot began in the street a little way below the cottage. The black seaman had been drinking all day, and on leaving the "Leaping Fish" had fallen into a savage quarrel with a drover. Two or three decent fellows stopped the fight and pulled him off; but they had done better by following up their kindness and seeing him out of the village, for he was now planted with his back to a railing, brandishing his stick and furiously challenging the whole mob. So far as concerned him the mischief ended by his overbalancing to aim a vicious blow at an urchin, and crashing down upon the kerb, where he lay and groaned, while the blood flowed from an ugly cut across the eyebrow,

Digitized by Google

For a while the crowd stood about him in some dismay. A few were for carrying him back to the public-house; but at some evil prompting a voice cried out, "Take him to the widow Johnstone's! A witch should know how to deal with her sib, the black man." I believe so godless a jest would never have been played, had not the cottage stood handy and (as one may say) closer than their better thoughts. But certain it is that they hoisted the poor creature and bore him into Mrs. Johnstone's garden, and began to fling handfuls of gravel at the upper windows, where a light was burning.

At the noise of it against the pane Mrs. Johnstone, who was bending over the bedroom fire and heating milk for her supper, let the pan fall from her hand. For the moment Kirstie thought she would swoon. But helping her to a seat in the armchair, the brave lass bade her be comforted—it could be naught but some roystering drunkard—and herself went downstairs and unbarred the door. At the sight of her—so frail a girl—quietly confronting them with a demand to know their business, the crowd fell back a step or two, and in that space of time by God's providence

Digitized by Google

arrived Peter Lawler, the constable, a very religious man, who gave the ringleaders some advice and warning they were not likely to forget. Being by this made heartily ashamed of themselves, they obeyed his order to pick up the man from the doorstep, where he lay at Kirstie's feet, and carry him back to the "Leaping Fish;" and so slunk out of the garden.

When all were gone Kirstie closed and bolted the door and returned upstairs to her mistress, whom she found sitting in her chair and listening intently.

"Who was it?" she demanded.

"Oh, nothing to trouble us, ma'am; but just a poor wandering blackamoor I met in the street to-day. The people, it seems, were bringing him here by mistake."

"A blackamoor!" cried Mrs. Johnstone, gasping. "A blackamoor!"

Now Kirstie was for running downstairs again to fetch some milk in place of what was spilt, but at the sound of the woman's voice she faced about.

"Pick together the silver, Kirstie, and fetch me my bonnet!" At first Mrs. Johnstone began to totter about the room without aim,

Digitized by Google

but presently fell to choosing this and that of her small possessions and tossing them into the seat of the armchair in a nervous hurry which seemed to gather with her strength. "Quick, lass! Did he see you? . . . ah, but that would not tell him. What like was he?" She pulled herself together and her voice quavered across the room. "Lass, lass, you will not forsake me? Do not speir now, but do all that I say. You promised—you did promise!" All this while she was working in a fever of haste, pulling even the quilt from the bed and anon tossing it aside as too burdensome. She was past all control. "Do not speir of me," she kept repeating.

"What, ma'am? Are we leaving?" Kirstie stammered once; but the strong will of the woman—mad though she might be—was upon her, and by-and-by the girl began packing in no less haste than her mistress. "But will you not tell me, ma'am?" she entreated between her labours.

"Not here! not here!" Mrs. Johnstone insisted. "Help me to get away from here!"

It was two in the morning when the women unlatched the door of the cottage and crept forth across the threshold—and across the stain

Digitized by Google

of blood which lay thereon, only they could not see it. They took the footpath, each with a heavy bundle beneath her arm, and turning their backs on Givens walked resolutely forward for three miles to the cross-roads where the Glasgow coach would be due to pass in the dawn. Upon the green there beside the sign-post Kirstie believes that she slept while Mrs. Johnstone kept guard over the bundles; but she remembers little until she found herself, as if by magic, on the coach-top and dozing on a seat behind the driver.

From Glasgow, after a day's halt, they took another coach to Edinburgh, and there found lodgings in a pair of attics high aloft in one of the great houses, or lands, which lie off Parliament Square to the north. The building —a warren you might call it—had six stories fronting the square, the uppermost far overhanging, and Kirstie affirms that her window, pierced in the very eaves, stood higher than the roof of St. Giles' Church.

Hither in due course a carrier's cart conveyed Mrs. Johnstone's sticks of furniture, and here for fifteen months the two women lay as close as two needles in a bottle of hay. The house stood upon a ridge, and at the back of it a

Digitized by Google

dozen double flights of stairs dived into courts and cellars far below the level of the front. It was by these—a journey in themselves—that Kirstie sometimes made exit and entrance when she had business at the shops, and she has counted up to me a list, which seemed without end, of the offices, workshops, and tenements she passed on her way, beginning with a wine store in the basement, mounting to *perruquiers'* and law-stationers' shops, and so up past bookbinders', felt-maker's, painters', die-sinkers', milliners' workrooms, to landings on which, as the roof was neared, the tenants herded closer and yet closer in meaner and yet meaner poverty.

The most of Kirstie's business was with Mr. John Seton, the agent, to whom she carried the thread spun by her mistress in the attic, and from whom she received the moneys and accounts of profits. Once or twice, at their first coming, Mrs. Johnstone had descended for a walk in the streets; but by this time the unhappy lady had it fixed in her mind that she was being watched and followed, and shook with apprehension at every corner. So pitiable indeed were the glances she flung behind her, and so frantic the precautions she used to

Digitized by Google

shake off her supposed pursuers and return by circuitous ways, that Kirstie pressed her to no more such expeditions.

To the girl, still ignorant of the cause of this terror, her mistress was evidently mad. But mad or no, she grew daily weaker in health and her handiwork began to worsen in quality, until Kirstie was forced to use deceit and sell only her own thread to Mr. Seton, though she pretended to dispose of Mrs. Johnstone's, and accounted for the falling off in profit by a feigned tale of brisker competition among their Dutch rivals—an imposture in which the agent helped her, telling the same story in writing; for Mrs. Johnstone, whose eye for a bargain continued as sharp as ever, had actually begun to suspect the lass of robbing her.

About this time as Kirstie passed down the stairs she took notice that a new tradesman had set up business on the landing below. At first she wondered that a barber—for this was his trade—should task his customers to climb so many flights from the street; but it seemed that the fellow knew what he was about, for after the first week she never descended without meeting a customer or two mounting to

Digitized by Google

his door or being followed down by one with his wig powdered and chin freshly scraped. The barber himself she never saw, though once, when the door stood ajar, she caught a glimpse of his white jacket and apron.

She believed that he entered into occupation at Michaelmas; at any rate, he had been plying his trade for close on two months, when on November 17th, 1739, and at a quarter to three in the afternoon, Kirstie went down to the Parliament Close to carry a packet of thread to Mr. Seton. The packet was smaller than usual, for Mrs. Johnstone had not been able to finish her weekly quantity; but this did not matter, since for a month past she had made none that was saleworthy.

Now this Mr. Seton was a pleasant man, in age almost threescore, and full of interest in Mrs. Johnstone, having done business for her and her mother, the Lady Balgarnock, pretty well all his life. And so it often happened that, while weighing the thread and making out his receipt for it, he would invite Kirstie to his office, in the rear of the shop, and discuss her mistress's health or some late news of the city, or advise her upon any small difficulty touching which she made bold to consult him

Digitized by Google

—as, for instance, this pious deception in the matter of the thread.

But to-day in the midst of their discourse Kirstie felt a sudden uneasiness. Explain it she could not. Yet there came to her a sense, almost amounting to certainty, that Mrs. Johnstone was in trouble and had instant need of her. She had left her but a few minutes, and in ordinary health; there was no reason to be given for this apprehension. Nevertheless, as I say, she felt it as urgent as though her mistress's own voice were calling. Mr. Seton observed her change of colour, and broke off his chat to ask what was amiss. She knew that if she stayed to explain he would laugh at her for a silly fancy; and if it were more than a fancy, why then to explain would be a loss of precious time. Pleading, therefore, some forgotten duty, she left the good man hurriedly, and hastening out through the shop ran across Parliament Close and up the great staircase as fast as her legs could take her.

By the time she reached the fourth flight of stairs she began to feel ashamed of the impulse which brought her, and to argue with herself against it; but at the same time her ears were open and listening for any unusual sound in

Digitized by Google

the rooms above. There was no such sound until she had mounted half-way up the sixth flight, when she heard a light footstep cross the landing, and, looking up, saw the barber's door very gently closing and shutting out a glimpse of his white jacket.

For the moment she thought little of this. The latch had scarcely clicked before she reached the landing outside, from which the last flight ran straight up to her mistress's door. It stood open, though she had closed it less than a quarter of an hour before. This was the first time she had found it open on her return.

She caught at the stair-rail. Through the door and over the line of the topmost stair she could just see the upper panes of the window at the back of Mrs. Johnstone's room. A heavy beam crossed the ceiling in front of the window, and from it, from a hook she had used that morning for twisting her yarn, depended a black bundle.

The bundle—it was big and shapeless—swayed ever so slightly between her and the yellow light sifted through the window. She tottered up, her knees shaking, and flung herself into the room with a scream.

Digitized by Google

While she fumbled, still screaming, at the bundle hanging from the beam, a step came swiftly up the stair, and the barber stood in the doorway. She recognised him by his white suit, and on the instant saw his face for the first time. He was a negro.

He laid a finger on his lips. Somehow the light showed them to her blood-red, although the rest of his features, barring the whites of his eyes, were all but indiscernible in the dusk. And somehow Kirstie felt a silence imposed on her by this gesture. He stepped across the boards swiftly and silently as a cat, found a stool, and set it under the beam. In the act of mounting it he signalled to Kirstie to run downstairs for help.

Silent as he, Kirstie slipped out at the door: on the threshold she glanced over her shoulder and saw him upon the stool fumbling with one hand at the yarn-rope, and with the other searching his apron pocket for a knife or razor. She ran down the garret stairs, down the next flight. . .

Here, on the landing, she paused. She had not screamed since the black man first appeared in the doorway. She was not screaming now; she felt that she could not

Digitized by Google

even raise the faintest cry. But a suspicion fastened like a hand on the back of her neck and held her.

She hesitated for a short while, and began to climb the stairs again. From the landing she looked up into the room. The black man was still on the stool, his hand still on the rope. He had not cut the bundle down—was no longer even searching for a knife.

She had been deceived. The man, whoever he was, had dismissed her when every moment was precious, and was himself not even trying to help. Nay, it might be . . .

She fought down the horror of it and rushed up the stair to fight the thing, man or devil, and save her mistress. On her way she fumbled for the scissors in her pocket. As she broke into the garret the barber, leaving the bundle to swing from its rope, stepped off the stool and, darting to a corner of the room, seemed to stand at bay there. Kirstie sprang toward the stool and hacked at the rope. As the body dropped she faced around on the man's corner, meaning to kill or be killed.

But there was no man in the corner. Her eyes searched into its dusk, and met only the shadow of the sloping attic. He had gone

Digitized by Google

without a sound. There had been no sound in the room but the thud of Mrs. Johnstone's body, and this thud seemed to Kirstie to be taken up and echoed by the blow of her own forehead upon the boards as she fell across the feet of her mistress.

Digitized by Google

The Mazed Election (1768)

A PASSAGE FROM THE ORAL HISTORY OF ARDEVORA

I.

WOMAN Suffrage? It's surprising to me how light some folks will talk—with a Providence, for all they know, waiting round the corner to take them at their word. I put my head in at the Working Man's Institute last night, and there was the new Coast-guard officer talking like a book, arguing about Woman Suffrage in a way that made me nervous. "Look 'ee here," he was saying, "a woman must be either married, or unmarried, or otherwise. Keep they three divisions clear in your heads, and then I'll ask you to follow me——" And all the company sitting round with their mouths open. I came away: I couldn't stand it. It put me in mind how my poor mother used to

Digitized by Google

warn me against squinting for fun. "One of these days," she 'd say, "the wind 'll take and change sudden while you 're doing it; and there you 'll be fixed and looking fifty ways for Sunday until we meet in the land of marrow and fatness."

And here in Ardevora, of all places!—where the womenkind be that masterful already, a man must get into his sea-boots before he can call his soul his own. Why, there was a woman here once that never asked for a vote in her life, and yet capsized an Election for Parliament—candidates, voters, and the whole apple-cart—as easy as you might turn over a plate. Did you ever hear tell of Kitty Lebow and her eight tall daughters? No; I daresay not. The world 's old and losing its memory when it begins to talk of Woman Suffrage.

This Kitty, or Christian, or Christiana Lebow was by birth a Bottrell: and a finer family than the Bottrells, by their own account, you wouldn't find in all England. Not that it matters whether they came over with William the Norman, nor whether they could once on a time ride from sea to sea on their own acres. For Kitty was the last to

Digitized by Google

carry the name, and she left it in Ardevora vestry the day she signed marriage with Paul Lebow (or, as he wrote it, Lebeau—"b-e-a-u"): and the property had gone generations before. As she said 'pon her death-bed, "five-foot-six of church-hay will hold the only two achers left to me," she being a little body and very facetious to the last, and meaning her legs, of course.

Now the reason I can't tell you: but the mischief with the Bottrells was this: That for generation after generation all the spirit of the family went to the females. The men just dandered away their time and their money, fell into declines, or had fits and went out like the snuff of a candle. But the women couldn't be held nor bound, lived to any age they pleased, and either kept their sweethearts on the hook or married them and made their lives a burden. Oh, a bean-fed sex, sir, and monstrous handsome! And Kitty, though little, was as handsome as any, and walked Ardevora streets with her eight daughters, all tall as grenadiers and terrible as an army with banners.

Her father, old Piers Bottrell, had been a ship's captain; a very tidy old fellow in his

Digitized by Google

behaviour, but muddled in mind, especially towards the end; so that when he died (which he did in his bed, quite peaceful) he must needs take and haunt the house. There wasn't a ha'porth of reason for it, that anyone could discover; and Kitty didn't mind it one farthing. But some say it frightened her husband into his grave: though I reckon he took worse fright at Kitty presenting him with eight daughters one after the other. With a woman like that, you can't say where accident ends and love of mischief begins. And for that matter, there was no telling why she 'd married the man at all except for mischief: his father and mother being poor French refugees that had come to Ardevora, thirty years before, and been given shelter by the borough charity in the old Ugnes House*— the same that old Piers Bottrell afterwards bought and died in: and Lebow himself, though born in the town and a fisherman by calling, never able to get his tongue round good plain English until the day he was drowned on the whiting-grounds and left Kitty a widow-woman.

All this, as you 'll see by-and-by, has to do

* Probably "Huguenots' House."

Digitized by Google

in one way or another with the Great Election, which took place in the year '68. (The way I 'm so glib with the date is that Kit Lebow was so proud of her doings on that day, she had a silver cup made for a *momentum* and used to measure out her guineas in it: and her great-great-gran'daughter, Mary Ann Cocking, has the cup to this day in her house in Nanjivvey Street, where I 've seen it a score of times and spelled out the writing, "C. L." —for Christian Lebow—"1768"). And concerning this Election you must know that "the Duke's interest," as they called it—that 's to say, the Whigs—had ruled the roost in Ardevora for more than fifty years; mainly through the Duke's agent, old Squire Martin of Tregoose, that collected the rents, held pretty well all the public offices inside his ten fingers, and would save up a grudge for time-out-of-mind against any man that crossed him. Two members we returned in those days, and in grown men's memories scarce a Tory among them.

There was grumbling, you may be sure: but the old gang held their way, and thought to carry this Election as easy as the others, until word came down that one of the Tory

Digitized by Google

candidates would be Dr. Macann, the famous Bath physician; and this was a facer.

What made this Dr. Macann such a tearing hot candidate was his having been born at Trudgian, a mile out of town here to the west'ard. The Macanns had farmed Trudgian, for maybe a hundred years, having come over from Ireland to start with: a poor, hand-to-mouth lot, respected for nothing but their haveage,* which was understood to be something out of the common. But this Samuel, as he was called, turned out a bright boy with his books, and won his way somehow to Cambridge College; and from College, after doing famously, he took his foot in his hand and went up to walk the London hospitals; and so bloomed out into a great doctor, with a gold-headed cane and a wonderful gift with the women—a personable man, too, with a neat leg, a high colour, and a voice like a church-organ. The best of the fellow was he helped his parents and never seemed ashamed of 'em. And for this, and because he 'd done credit to the town, the folks couldn't make too much of him.

Well, as I said, this putting up of Macann

* Lineage.

Digitized by Google

was a facer for the Duke's men, and they met at the George and Dragon Inn to talk over their unpopularity. There was old Squire Martin, as wicked as a buck rat in a sink; and his son Bob that had lately taken over the Duke's agency; and his brother Ned, the drunken Vicar of Trancells; and his second cousin John Martin, otherwise John à Hall, all wit and no character; and old Parson Polsue, with his curate, old Mr. Grandison, the one almost too shaky to hold a churchwarden pipe while the other lighted it; and Roger Newte, whose monument you see over the hill—a dapper, youngish-looking man, very careful of his finger-nails and smooth in his talk till he got you in a corner. Last but not least was this Roger Newte, who had settled here as Collector of Customs and meant to be Mayor next year; a man to go where the devil can't, and that's between the oak and the rind.

Well, there they were met, drinking punch and smoking their clays and discussing this and that; and Mr. Newte keeping the peace between John à Hall, with his ill-regulated tongue, and the old Parson, who, to say truth, was half the cause of their unpopularity, the

Digitized by Google

church services having sunk to a public scandal; and yet they durstn't cast him over, by reason that he owned eight ramshackle houses, and his curate a couple besides, and by mock-sale could turn these into as many brand-new voters.

"There's nothing for it but pluck," said Mr. Newte. "We must make a new Poor Rate. They've been asking a new one for years; and, bejimbers! I hope they'll like the one they get."

The old Squire stroked his chin. "That's a bit too dangerous, Newte."

"Where's the danger? Churchwardens and Overseers, we can count on every man."

"The parish will appeal, as sure as a gun. King's Bench will send down a *mandamus*, and the game's up. I don't want to go to prison at my time of life."

"I know something of the law," said Mr. Newte—and indeed he'd studied it at Lincoln's Inn, and kept more knowledge under his wig than any man in the borough. "I know something of law, and there's no question of going to prison. The Tories will appeal to the next Quarter Sessions, and Quarter Sessions will maybe quash the Rate; and that'll take

Digitized by Google

time. Then the Overseers will sit still for a week or two, or a month or two, until the Tories lose patience and apply to London for a writ. Down comes the writ, we'll say. Whereupon the Overseers will sit down and make out a new Rate just a shade different from the last, and the Tories will have to begin again—Quarter Sessions, Court o' King's Bench, *mandamus*——"

"King's Bench will send down, more like, and attach the Overseers for contempt of Court," suggested young Bob Martin, who was one of them.

"Not a bit of it; but I'll allow you may find it hard to keep their pluck to the sticking-point. Very well, then here's another plan: When it comes to the writ, the Overseers can make out a new Rate 'agreeable to the form and tenor of the same,' as the words go. But a new Rate's worthless until you, Squire, and you, Parson, have signed the allowance for it as magistrates: and now comes your turn to give trouble."

"And how'm I to do that?" asked the old Squire.

"Why, by keeping out of the way, to be sure. Take a holiday: find out some little

Digitized by Google

spa that suits your complaint, and go and drink the waters."

"Ay, do, Parson," chimed in John à Hall. "Take Grandison, here, along with you, and we'll all have a holiday together."

"At the worst," chipped in Newte, "they'll fine you fifty pounds for misbehaviour."

"Fifty pounds! Fine me fifty pounds?" the Parson quavered, his pipe-stem waggling.

"Bless your heart, sir, we can work it in somehow with the Election expenses. But it may not come to that. Parliament's more than five years old already, and I'll warrant the King dissolves it by next spring at latest: which reminds me that keeping an eye on the Voters' List is all very well, but unless we can find a hot pair of candidates, this Macann may unsaddle us after all."

Digitized by Google

II.

WELL, this or something like it was the plan agreed on; and for candidates they managed to get the Duke's own son, Lord William, and a Major Dyngwall, a friend of his, very handsome to look at, but shy in the mouth-speech. With Dr. Macann the Tories put up a Mr. Saule, from Bristol, who took a terrible deal of snuff and looked wise, but had some maggot in his head that strong drink isn't good for a man. Why or how this should be he might have known but couldn't tell, being a desperate poor speaker, and, if possible, a worse hand at it than Major Dyngwall.

I won't take you through all the battle over the Poor Rate. You understand that the right of voting for Parliament belonged to all the inhabitants of the borough paying Scot and Lot; and who these were the Rate-sheet determined. So you may fancy the pillaloo that went up when the Overseers posted their new assessment on the church door and 'twas found they'd ruled out no less than sixty voters

Digitized by Google

known, or suspected to be, in Dr. Macann's interest. The Tories appealed to Quarter Sessions, of course, and the Rate was quashed. On their side, Roger Newte and Bob Martin kept the Overseers up to the proper mark of stubbornness: so to London the matter went, and from London down came the order for a new assessment. But by this time Parliament's days were numbered; and, speculating on this, Mr. Newte (who was now Mayor of the Borough) played a stroke in a thousand. He persuaded the Overseers to make a return to the writ certifying they had obeyed it to the best of their skill and conscience, and drawn up a new list: which list they posted a fortnight later, and only seven days—as it turned out—before Parliament dissolved: and will you believe it, but the only difference between it and the old one was that they'd added the name of Christiana Lebow, widow —who, being a woman, hadn't a vote at all!

But wait a bit! The Overseers, choosing their time, had this new list posted in the church porch at ten o'clock one morning; and having posted it, stepped across the road to the "George and Dragon." The old inn used to stand slap opposite the church; and there, in

Digitized by Google

the parlour-window, were assembled all the Duke's men—Squire Martin and his son, Roger Newte, John à Hall, the Parson, and, all the rest of the gang—as well to see how the people would take it as to give the timorous Overseers a backing. This was Newte's idea—to sit there in full view, put a bold face on it, and have the row—if row there was to be—over at once. And, to top it up, they had both the Whig candidates with them—these having arrived in Ardevora three days before, and begun their canvass, knowing that Parliament must be dissolved and the new writs issued in a few days at farthest.

Well, a crowd gathered at once about the list, and some ran off with the dare-devil news of it, while others hung about and grumbled and let out a few oaths every now and then and looked like men in two minds about stoning the windows opposite, where the Duke's gang lounged as careless as brass, sipping their punch and covering the poor Overseers, that half expected to be ducked in the harbour sooner or later for their morning's work.

For one solid hour they sat there, fairly daunting the crowd: but as the church clock struck eleven, Major Dyngwall, the candidate

Digitized by Google

—that was talking to old Parson Polsue, and carrying it off very fairly—puts his eyeglass up of a sudden, and, says he, "Amazons, begad!" meaning, as I have heard it explained, that here were some out-of-the-common females.

And out of the common they were—Kit Lebow with her eight daughters, all wafting up the street like a bevy of peacocks in their best hoops and bonnets: Kit herself sailing afore, with her long malacca staff tap-tapping the cobbles, and her tall daughters behind like a bodyguard—two and two—Maria, Constantia, Elizabeth Jane, Perilla, Christian the Younger, Marcella, Thomasine, and Lally. Along she comes, marches up to the board—the crowd making way for her—and reads down the list. "H'm," says she, and wheeling to the rightabout, marches straight across to the open window of the "George."

"Give you good morning, gentlemen," says she, dropping a curtsey. "I see you 've a-put me on the Voters' List; and, with your leave, I 'd like a look at your candidates."

"With pleasure, madam," says Lord William, starting up from the table where he was writing at the back of the room, and coming forward with a bow. And Major

Digitized by Google

Dyngwall bowed likewise to her and to the whole company of her daughters spreading out behind her like a fan. "Take your glass down from your eye, young man," she said, addressing herself to the Major. "One window should be shelter enough for a sojer—and la! you're none so ill-featured for a pair of Whigs."

"Ay," put in John à Hall, "they'll stand comparisons with your Sammy Macann, mistress." And he pitched to sing a verse of his invention, that the Whigs of the town afterwards got by heart—

"Doctor Macann
's an Irishman,
He's got no business here;
Mister Saule
He's nothin' at all,
He won't lev us have no beer.

"Well, indeed now," answered Kitty, pitching her voice back for the crowd to hear, "'tis the Martins should know if the Macanns be Irish, and what business an Irishman has in Ardevora: for, if I recollect, the first Macann and the first Martin were shipwrecked together coming over from Dungarvan in a cattle-boat, and they do say 'twas Macann owned the

Digitized by Google

cattle and Martin drove 'em. And as for Mr. Saule," she went on, while the crowd grinned to see John à Hall turning red in the gills, "if he stops off the beer in this town, 'tis yourself will be the healthier for it, whoever's hurt."

"May I have the pleasure to learn this lady's name?" asked Lord William very politely, turning to the old Squire.

"She's just an eccentric body, my Lord," said he; "and, I'm sorry to say, a violent enemy to your Lordship's cause."

"Hoity-me-toity!" says Kitty. "I'm Christian Lebow, that used to be Bottrell: which means that your forefathers and mine, my Lord, came over to England together, like the Macanns and the Martins, though maybe some time before, and not in a cattle-boat. No enemy am I to your Lordship, nor to the Major here, as I'll prove any day you choose to drink a dish of tea with me or to taste my White Ale; but only to the ill company you keep with these Martins and Newtes, that have robbed sixty honest men of their votes and given one to me that can't use it. I can't use it to keep you out of Parliament-house. I would if I could—honest fighting between gentlefolks; but I may use it before the

Digitized by Google

Election's over to make these rogues laugh on the wrong side of their faces."

She used to say afterwards that the words came into her mouth like prophesying: but I believe she just spoke out in her temper, as women will. At any rate, Lord William smiled and bowed, and said he, "The Major and I will certainly do ourselves the pleasure of calling and tasting your ale, Mrs. Lebow."

"The recipe is three hundred years old," said Kitty, and swept him a curtsey, the like of which for stateliness you don't see nowadays: it wants practice and sea-room. And all her eight daughters curtsied to the daps behind her in a half-moon, to the delight of Major Dyngwall, that had been studying Lally the youngest (which is short for Eulalia), through his eyeglass. And with that, to the admiration of the multitude, they faced about and went sailing up the street.

Digitized by Google

III.

WELL, I suppose in the heat of the fight—the nomination taking place a few days afterwards, and the struggle being a mighty doubtful one, for all the trick of the Rating List, against which the Tories had sent up an appeal—Lord William forgot all about his promise to call and taste Mrs. Lebow's White Ale. It came into his mind of a sudden on the day before the Election, being Sunday morning, and he breakfasting with the Major and half a dozen of their supporters up at Tregoose, where old Squire Martin kept open house for the Whigs right through the contest.

"Plague take it!" says he, running his eye down the Voters' List between his sips of coffee. "I've clean neglected that old lady and her brew. I suppose 'tis dreadful stuff?" he goes on, rather anxious-like, lifting an eye towards the old Squire.

"I've never had the privilege to taste it," says the Squire,

Digitized by Google

"Oh, 'tis none so bad," puts in the Major carelessly.

"Why, Dyngwall—how the Dickens alive do *you* know?"

"I dropped in the other day—in fact, I've called once or twice. The old lady's monstrous entertaining," answered the Major, pretty pink in the face.

"O-ho!" Lord William screwed up one eye. "And so, belike, are the eight handsome daughters? But look ye here, Dyngwall," says he, "I can't have you skirmishing on your own account in this fashion. If there's a baby left to be kissed in this town—or anything older, for that matter—we go shares, my lad."

"You needn't be so cussedly offensive, need you?" says the Major, firing up, to the astonishment of all.

Lord William looks at him for a moment. "My dear fellow," says he, "I beg your pardon."

And the Major was mollified at once, the two (as I said) being old friends.

"But all the same," says his Lordship to himself, "I'd best go call on this old lady without losing time." So he put it to Squire

Digitized by Google

Martin: "I've a promise to keep, and to-morrow we shall be busy-all. Couldn't we start early to-day, and pay Mrs. Lebow a visit on our way to church?"

"You won't get no comfort out of calling," said the Squire: "but let it be as you please."

So off they set: and as Kitty and her daughters were tying their bonnet-strings for churchgoing—blue and gold every one of them (these being the Tory colours), and only Lally thinking to herself that scarlet and orange might, maybe, suit her complexion better—there came a knock at the door, and squinting over her blind Kitty caught sight of Lord William and the Major, with the old Squire behind them, that had never crossed her doorstep in his life.

She wasn't going to lower her colours, of course. But down she went in her blue and gold, opened the door, and curtseyed. (Oh! the pink of manners!) "No inconvenience at all," she said, and if ever a cordial was needed it would be before sitting out one of old Parson Palsy's forty-year-old sermons. So out came the famous White Ale, with the long-stemmed glasses proper to drink it from, and a dish of ratafias to corroborate the

Digitized by Google

stomach. And behold, all was bowing and compliments and enmity forgot, till Lord William happened to say—

"Strong stuff, Squire—eh? The Major should look to his head with it, after his morning tankard: but for coffee-drinkers like you and me I reckon there's no danger."

Kitty gave a little gasp, all to herself. "Do you take coffee with your breakfast, my Lord?" she asked—and declared to her last day it seemed like another person speaking, her voice sounded so faint and unnatural.

"Ha-bitually," says Lord William, and begins discoursing on the coffee-bean, and how it cleared the brain.

Kitty couldn't look at him steady, but was forced to glance away and out of window. The tears and the fun were rising together within her like a spring tide. Lord William thought that her mind was running on the clock, and she wished to be rid of them. So the bowing and compliments began again, and inside of ten minutes the visitors had made their congees and were out in the street. The door was scarcely shut upon them when Kitty sank down all of a heap in her armchair and began to rock herself to and fro.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, oh, oh!" she began; and her daughters truly thought at first 'twas hysterics. "I'll give it forty minutes," she said. "Maria, if 'twasn't so near upon church-time, I'd ask you to loosen my stays. White Ale upon coffee! Oh, oh, oh!" And with that she started up. "Forty minutes! What it'll do in forty minutes no earthly power can tell. But get ready, girls, and follow close till I'm safe in church."

So forth she sailed, and her eight daughters behind her, down the street, in by the churchyard gate, and up through the crowd to the porch with her face set like the calm of Doomsday.

Digitized by Google

IV.

WELL, the congregation settled itself, and service began, and not a sign—as why should there be?—of any feelings but holy devotion. The Whigs looked at their books, and the Tories looked at their books; and poor old Curate Grandison lost his place and his spectacles, and poor old Parson Polsue dropped asleep in the First Lesson. He'd neglected two parishes to come and preach the sermon: for Ardevora, you must know, was one of three livings he held besides a canonry, and he kept Grandison to serve the three, that being all he could afford after paying for his carriage-and-pair and postillions to carry him back and forth between us and Penzance, where he lodged for the sake of his asthma and the little card-parties for which Penzance was famous in those days. But not even an Election Sunday could keep him properly awake. So on went the old comedy, as by law established; the congregation, Whig and Tory, not able to hear one word in ten, but taking their cues from Tommy Size, the parish clerk.

Digitized by Google

The first sign of something amiss came about midway in the hymn before the sermon, with old Squire Martin's setting down his book and dropping into his seat very sudden. Few noticed it, the pew being a tall one; but the musicianers overlooking it from the gallery saw him crossing his hands over his waistcoat, which caused one or two to play their notes false; and Nance Julian in the pew behind heard him groan: "I can't sit it out! Not for a hundred pounds can I sit it out!"

By this time Parson Polsue, with his sermon tucked under his arm, was tottering up the pulpit stairs, and Churchwarden Hancock standing underneath, as usual, to watch him arrive safe or to break his fall if he tumbled. And just as he reached the top and caught hold of the desk cushion to stay himself, Lord William dropped out of view in the face of the congregation, and the hymn—music and singing together—ciphered out like an organ with its bellows slit.

The next moment open flew the door of the Tregoose pew, and out poured Lord William and Squire Martin with judgment on their faces, making a bee-line for the fresh air; and after them Major Dyngwall with a look of

Digitized by Google

concern; and after him young Bob Martin, that had only waited to pick up the others' hats.

Well, you can't run a spark through a barrel of gunpowder. Like wildfire it flew about the church that the Duke's party and the Parson had quarrelled, and this was a public protest. Whig and Tory settled that with one scrape of the feet, and Major Dyngwall turned in the porch to find the whole crowd at his heels.

"My good people," says he, "pray don't alarm yourselves! I—I don't quite know what's the matter: a sudden indisposition—nothing serious. Do, please, go back!"

"Go back? Not a bit of it! You 're quite right, sir—disgrace to a Christian country—high time for a public example—stand to it, sir, and the Bishop will have to interfere. Three cheers for the Red and Orange! Three cheers for Religion and no Abuses! Three cheers for Lord William and Major Dyngwall! Hip-hip-hooray!" Do what the Major might, the crowd swept him and the poor sufferers through the churchyard and across the street, and hung cheering around the "George and Dragon," while he dosed the pair inside with hot brandy-and-water.

Digitized by Google

And all this while Kitty stood—as she declared ever after—with the thoughts hissing in her head like eggs in a frying-pan. She heard the crowd cheering outside, and felt the votes slipping away with every cheer. She cast her eyes up to the pulpit, and there, through a haze, saw old Parson Polsue rubbing his spectacles and shaking like an aspen. Her wits only came back to her when the Tory candidates, in the pew before her, reached for their hats and prepared to follow the mob. Dr. Macann was actually fumbling with the button of the door. Quick as thought then she seized a hassock, sprang on it, and, reaching over the partition, pressed a hand down on his chestnut wig.

"Sit still—sit still, man!" she commanded. "Thee 'rt throwing helve after hatchet, I tell 'ee. What 's a stomach-ache, after all?"

"I don't follow you, Mrs. Lebow," said the Doctor: and small blame to him.

"Never you mind about understanding," said Kitty. "But sit you down and keep your eye on the Parson. See the colour on him—that 's anger, my dear! And see his jaw, full of blessed stubbornness! Nine good votes he has, and old Grandison a couple

Digitized by Google

beside: and every one of 'em as good as cast for you, if you 'll sit it out. Sit quiet for two minutes now, and to-morrow you shall sit for Ardevora."

"But the crowd?" the Doctor couldn't help murmuring, though none the less he obeyed.

Kitty's eye began to twinkle. "Leave the crowd to me," she was beginning, when her eye lit on John à Hall, that had entered and was making his way towards the pulpit, from which in the fury of his anger old Polsue was climbing down with a nimbleness you wouldn't believe. And with that she almost laughed out, for a worse peacemaker the Whigs couldn't have chosen. But Major Dyngwall had sent him, having none to advise, and being near to his wits' end, poor young man.

"Beg your pardon, Parson," began John à Hall, stepping up with that grin on his face which he couldn't help and which the Parson abominated: "but I 'm here to bring Lord William's compliments and apologies, and assure you from him that your sermon had nothing to do with his stomach-ache. Nothing whatever!"

Parson Polsue opened his mouth to answer,

Digitized by Google

but thought better of it. I reckon he remembered the sacred edifice. At any rate he went past John à Hall with a terrific turn of speed, and old Grandison after him: and the next news was the vestry-door slammed-to behind them both, as 'twere with the very wind of wrath.

"And my poor mother used to recommend it for the colic!" said Kitty; which puzzled the Doctor worse than ever.

Digitized by Google

V.

BEFORE evening 'twas known through Ardevora that the Parson's votes and interests had been booked by the Tories; which, of course, only made the Church rebels (as you might call them) the more set on standing by their conversion and voting for the Whigs. Nobody could tell their numbers for certain, but nobody put them down under twenty; and both the Doctor and Mr. Saule called on Kitty that evening with faces like fiddles. But Kitty wasn't to be daunted. "My dears," she said, "if the worst comes to the worst, and you can't win these votes back by four o'clock to-morrow, I've a stocking full of guineas at your service; and I ha'n't lived in Ardevora all this while without picking up the knowledge how to spend 'em; and *that's* at your service too. But we'll try a cheaper way first," says she, smiling to herself very comfortably.

Up at Tregoose they'd put Lord William and the old Squire to bed: and a score of Whig supporters spent the best part of the

Digitized by Google

evening downstairs in the dining-room, with Major Dyngwall in the chair, working out the Voters' List and making fresh calculations. On the whole they felt cheerful enough, and showed it: but they had to own, first, that the Parson's votes were almost as bad as lost, whereas the amount of gains couldn't be reckoned with certainty: and second, that, resting as they did upon a confusion between religious feeling and the stomach-ache, 'twas important that Lord William should recover by next morning, show himself about the town and at the hustings, and clinch the mistake. John à Hall, who had a head on his shoulders when parsons weren't concerned, shook it at this. He didn't believe for a moment that Lord William could be brought up to the poll; and as it turned out, he was right. But towards the end of the discussion he put forward a very clever suggestion.

"I don't know," says he, "if the Major here 's an early riser?"

"Moderately," says Major Dyngwall, looking for the moment as if the question took him fairly aback. They didn't think much of this at the time, but it came back to their minds later on.

Digitized by Google

"Well, then," says John à Hall, "you're all terrible certain about the Parson's votes being lost; but dang me if I've lost hope of 'em yet. Though I can't do it myself, I believe the old fool could be handled. By five in the morning, say, we shall know about Lord William. If he can't leave his bed—and I'll bet he can't—I suggest that the Major steps down, pays an early call, and tells Parson the simple truth from beginning to end."

"An excellent suggestion!" put in Mr. Newte. "I was about to make it myself. There's nothing like telling the truth, after all: and I'll take care it doesn't get about the town till the poll's closed."

Well, so it was arranged: and early next morning, after dressing himself very carefully and making sure that Lord William couldn't leave his room (he was as yellow as an egg, poor fellow, with a kind of mild janders), away the Major starts upon his errand, promising to be back by seven, to be driven down to the poll behind a brass band.

On the stroke of eight, when Roger Newte, as Mayor and Returning Officer, declared the poll open, down the street came the blue-and-gold band, with Dr. Macann and Mr. Saule

Digitized by Google

behind it bowing and smiling in a two-horse shay, and a fine pillaloo of supporters. They cheered like mad to find themselves first in the field, though disappointed in their hearts (I believe), having counted on a turn-up with the opposition band, just to start the day sociably. The Tory candidates climbed the hustings, and there the Doctor fired off six speeches and Mr. Saule a couple, while the votes came rolling in like pennies at the door of a menagerie. And still no sign of the Whigs, nor sound of any band from the direction of Tregoose. By half-past eight Roger Newte was looking nervous, and began to send off small boys to hurry his friends up. Towards nine o'clock Dr. Macann made another speech, and set the crowd roaring with "'Tis the voice of the sluggard," out of Dr. Watts's hymn-book. "But I don't even hear his voice!" said he, very facetious-like: and "Seriously, gentlemen, my Whig friends might be more careful of your feelings. We know that they consider Ardevora their own: but they might at least avoid insulting the British Liberty they have injured"—telling words, these, I can assure you. "Nor," he went on, "is it quite fair treatment of our

Digitized by Google

worthy Mayor here, who cannot be expected, single-handed, to defy you as he defied the Court of King's Bench and treat your votes as he treated your Rate List." Newte had to stand there and swallow this, though it was poison to him, and he swore next day he'd willingly spend ten years in the pit of the wicked for getting quits with Macann. But what fairly knocked the fight out of him was to see, five minutes later, old Parson Polsue totter up the steps towards him with a jaw stuck out like a mule's, and Grandison behind, and all their contingent. Though made up of Tories to a man, the crowd couldn't help hissing; but it affected the old Parson not a doit.

"Macann and Saule," said he, speaking up sharp and loud: and at the names the hissing became a cheer fit to lift the roofs off their eaves.

Newte fairly forgot himself. "Ha—haven't you seen Major Dyngwall this morning?" he managed to ask.

And with that the crowd below parted, and John à Hall came roaring through it like a bull.

"Where's the Major? Major Dyngwall! Who's seen Major Dyngwall?"

Digitized by Google

"Ay, we're all asking that?" called out some person, sarcastic-like: and all began to laugh and to boo. But John à Hall caught at the rail and swung himself up the steps.

"You thundering fools!" he bellowed. "Is it foul play that tickles you? One of our candidates you've contrived to poison, and I've left him at Tregoose between life and death. What have you done with the other?" By this time he had the mob fairly hushed and gaping. "What have you done with the other?" he shouted, banging his fist down on the Returning Officer's table. "Let Parson Polsue speak first, for to my knowledge the Major was bound for his lodgings when last seen."

"I haven't set eyes on him," said Parson Polsue.

"I saw him!" piped up a woman in the crowd. "I saw him about six this morning. He was walking along the foreshore towards Mr. Grandison's."

At this everyone turned to the Curate; but he shook his head. "Major Dyngwall has not called on me this morning. Indeed, I have not seen him."

"Then run you and search—half a dozen of

Digitized by Google

you!" commanded John à Hall. "I'll get to the bottom of this, I warn you. And as for you, Dr. Macann, and you, Mr. Saule—if you haven't learnt the difference between honest fighting and poisoning—kidnapping—murder, maybe——"

But he got no further. "That's enough of big words," said a voice, very quiet, but so that all had to listen: and behold, there was Kitty Lebow mounting the steps, as cool as cream in a dairy.

She landed on the platform and took a glance about her, and the folk read in her eye that she had come to enjoy herself. "Reckon I have a right here so well as the best of you, since you put me on the Rate List," says she, with a dry sort of twinkle. And with that she rounded on John à Hall. "I think I heard you talkin' of poison, Mr. Martin," says she, "not to mention kidnapping, and worse. And you asked, or my ears deceived me, if we knew the difference between poison and fair play? Well, we do. And likewise we know the difference between sickness and shamming; and likewise, again, the difference between making a demonstration in church and walking out because you've three fingers of White

Digitized by Google

Ale inside you and it don't lie down with your other vittles. I ask ye, folks all"—and here she swung round to the crowd—"did ever one of you hear that Christiana Lebow's White Ale was poison? Hasn't it been known and famous in this town before ever a Martin came to trouble us? And hasn't it times and again steadied my own inside when it rebelled against their attorney's—tricks? Well now, I tell you, I gave three fingers of it to Lord William yesterday when he called in the way of politeness on his road to church: and sorry I am for the young man; and wouldn't ha' done it if I guessed he'd been taking coffee with his breakfast. For White Ale and coffee be like Bottrells and Martins: they weren't made to mix. And another three fingers I doled out to the old Squire, and more by token 'twas the first time he'd ever darkened my threshold. That's my story: 'tis truth from a truth-speaking woman. And now if any silly fellow is going to vote Whig because o' yesterday, all I can say is—let him drink a breakfast cup of coffee and come to me for a glass of the other stuff; and if in forty minutes' time he's got any particular concern about Church matters, you may call me a—a—Martin!"

Digitized by Google

"That's all very well, ma'am," shouted John à Hall, as soon as he could make himself heard for the laughing. "But it don't account for the Major."

"'Twasn't meant to, my son," snapped Kitty, by this time in high good humour over her success as a public speaker. "But you started to talk about poison, so I thought I'd correct 'ee before you made a second goose of yourself over kidnapping."

But just at this moment a couple of men came running and shouting from the far end of the street.

"We've found 'en! We've found 'en!"

"Where is he *to?*" and "I told you so!" cried John à Hall and Kitty both in one breath.

"He's over 'pon the Island, making love to Mrs. Lebow's youngest daughter, Lally! The tide's cut 'em off; but Arch'laus Trebilcock's put off to fetch 'em home in his new boat!"

I've heard tell that Kitty took it steady as a regiment. It must have been a dreadful moment, the laughter turning on a sudden against her. But she stood for a while, and then to the surprise of everyone she lifted

Digitized by Google

her head and smiled with the best. Then she caught old Polsue's eye, who was watching her as only a parson can, and, like a woman, she fixed on him as the man to answer.

"I reckon I can trust a daughter o' mine," says she.

It must have been nervous work for her, though, as they brought the pair along the street: and poor Lally didn't help her much by looking a picture of shame. But the Major stepped along gaily and up to the platform; and I'll warrant a tier of guns there couldn't have tried a man's courage worse.

"I humbly beg your pardon, madam. The tide cut us off while I was engaged in persuading your daughter to accept my hand. I cannot tell you"—here he let fly a lover's glance at Lally—"if the delay helped me. But she has accepted me, ma'am, and with your leave we shall be the happiest couple in England."

They *do* say that Mrs. Lebow's hand went up to box the poor girl's ears. But the Bottrells had wits as well as breed, one and all; and it ended by her giving the Major two fingers and dropping him one of those curtseys that I've described to you already.

Digitized by Google

Ay, and the cream of the fun was that, what with her public speaking for one party and giving her daughter to the other, the doubtful voters couldn't for the life of them tell how to please her. "I 'll vote, if you please, for Mrs. Lebow," said more than one of them, "if you 'll tell me which side she 's for." And I suppose that gave Newte his chance. At any rate, he returned Lord William and Major Dyngwall as polling 85 and 127 against Dr. Macann 42 and Mr. Saule 36. And so Miss Lally became a Member of Parliament's wife and rode in her coach.

"Indeed, and I 'm sorry for Macann," said Kitty that night, as she untied her bonnet-strings; "but taking one thing with another, 'tis long since I 've had such an enjoyable day."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Hotwells Duel

From the Memoirs of Joshua Frampton, Esq., late Honorary Physician to the Wells, and Surgeon

I CANNOT pass this year 1790 without speaking of a ridiculous adventure which, but that it providentially happened at the close of our season, when the Spa was emptying and our fashionables talked more of packing their trunks than of the newest scandals, might have done me some professional damage besides bringing unmerited public laughter upon the heads of two honest gentlemen. As it was, our leading news-sheet, the *Hotwells Courant*, did not even smoke the affair, and so lost a nine days' wonder; while the Whig *Examiner*, after printing an item which threw me into a two days' perspiration, forbore to follow up the scent—the reason being that Mr. Lemoine, its editor, was shortly expecting an addition

Digitized by Google

to his family, and, knowing his nervousness upon these occasions and his singular confidence in my skill, I was able to engage him by arguments to which at another time he might have listened less amiably.

I have already related how, on the approach of autumn, I advertised for an assistant. The young man whom I selected was a Scotsman from the University of Glasgow, Duncan MacRea by name, and no youth of his age could have brought better testimonials to ability or character. Relying upon these, I did not stand out for an interview—his home lying so far away as Largs, in Ayrshire—but came to terms at once, and he arrived at my door with his valise at the untimely hour of five in the morning, the fifteenth of October, having travelled all the way to Bristol in a ship laden with salted herrings.

I will own that this apparition on my doorstep in the cold morning light (he had rung the night-bell) surprised me somewhat. But I remembered the proverbial impetuosity of Scotsmen in pushing their fortunes, and his personal appearance may have helped to conciliate me, since my mind had misgiven me that I had done wiser to insist on an

Digitized by Google

interview, instead of buying a pig in a poke; for looks no less than knowledge are a physician's *passepartout* among the ladies who bring their ailments to our provincial spas. The face which the lad lifted towards my bedroom window was a remarkably handsome one, though pallid, and the voice in which he answered my challenge had a foreign intonation, but musical and in no way resembling the brogue for which I had been preparing myself.

So delighted was I at this dissipation of my fears that, slipping on my dressing-gown (I believe without removing my nightcap), and pausing only on the landing to call up to the maidservants to light a fire and prepare coffee with all speed, I hurried downstairs and unbarred the door. Whereupon Master MacRea instantly and with great cordiality shook me by the hand.

"It is a great pleasure to me, Dr. Frampton, to make your acquaintance, more especially, sir, to find you surrounded by those evidences of a prosperous practice which I had indeed inferred from your genteel reticence and the quality of your notepaper. At the end of a long journey, undertaken on the strength of

Digitized by Google

that inference, it is delightful to find my best hopes confirmed."

He shook me by the hand again very warmly. Taken aback by this extraordinary address, I gasped once or twice, and even then could find nothing better to say than that he must have found his journey fatiguing.

"Fatiguing, perhaps, but not tiresome. To the philosophic mind, Dr. Frampton, there should be no such thing as tedium, boredom, *ennui*, and I trust that mine is philosophic. You were much in my thoughts, sir, between the attacks of sea-sickness. By frequent perusal I had committed your two epistles to memory, and while silently rehearsing their well-turned sentences, in the words of Dr. Samuel Johnson I pursued in imagination the pleasures of hope, yet without listening to the whispers of credulity—for I was prepared to find your flattering description fade upon a nearer prospect. But I am reassured!"

Positively he shook hands for a third time. Confound the fellow! I had merely hinted that my patients, or the most of them, were of good social position, and had offered him board and lodging, with a salary of forty pounds, rising five pounds annually.

Digitized by Google

"And by Heavens!" he exclaimed, spinning round on his heel at a sound of hasty footsteps crossing the square, "here comes fresh confirmation! A black manservant—and, as I live, in a gold-laced hat! Of such things I have read in books, but how much livelier, Dr. Frampton, is the ocular appeal of reality!"

It was, to be sure, Major Dignum's black valet Gumbo, and with a note for me. The fellow's disordered dress and quick breathing spoke of urgency, and I broke the seal at once, wondering the while what could have befallen the Major, a retired and gouty West Indian whom I had been visiting daily for three months at his apartments in the Grand Pump Hotel. The missive ran:—

"My dear Dr. Frampton,—As a friend rather than a patient, I beg you to come to me without delay! Pray ask no questions of Gumbo, who knows nothing. You will need no spurring when I tell you that though in no worse than my usual health, a few hours may see me in eternity. Confidently yours,

"Orlando Dignum (Major)."

I folded the letter, and nodded to Gumbo,

Digitized by Google

"Tell your master that I will delay only to shave and dress before calling on him."

The faithful fellow had been watching me anxiously. "In the name of goodness, doctor, ain't you going to tell me what's wrong?"

"I know as little as you," said I. "But, whatever it is, the Major thinks it serious; so run, my man, and say that I am following."

With something like a groan, Gumbo started off, and I turned to Mr. MacRea. "You will find a cup of coffee in your room," I said. "I must attend to this sudden call; but possibly by the time you have washed and changed, I may be free to rejoin you at breakfast, when we can talk at leisure."

The young man had caught up his valise, but set it down again and laid three fingers on my sleeve. "You speak of a change of clothes, sir. I will be frank with you—these breeches in which you behold me are my only ones. They were a present from my mother's sister, resident in Paisley, and I misdoubt there will have been something amiss in her instructions to the tailor, for they gall me woundily—though in justice to her and the honest tradesman I should add that my legs,

Digitized by Google

maybe, are out of practice since leaving Glasgow. At Largs, sir, I have been reverting to the ancestral garb."

"You 'll wear no such thing about the Hotwells," I interposed.

"Indeed, I was not thinking it likely. My purpose was to procure another pair on my arrival—aye, and I would do so before breaking fast, had not circumstances which I will not detain you by relating put this for the moment out of the question. Do not mistake me, Dr. Frampton. In public I will thole these dreadful articles, though it cost me my skin; but in private, sir, if as a favour you will allow me—if, as a bachelor yourself, you will take it *sans gêne*. And, by-the-by, I trust you will not scruple to point out any small defects in my French accent, which has been acquired entirely from books."

He had, in fact, pronounced it "jeen," but I put this by. "Quite impossible, Mr. MacRea! I have to think of the servants."

"Eh? You have servants!"

"Four or five," said I.

His eyes seemed ready to start out of his head. "I had opined by the way you opened the door with your own hand——" He broke

Digitized by Google

off, and exclaimed: "Four or five servants! It will be a grand practice of yours! Well, go your ways, Dr. Frampton—I must e'en study to live up to you."

Having piloted my eccentric upstairs and left him to his toilet, I lost no time in dressing and presenting myself at the Grand Pump Hotel, where I found my West Indian friend in a truly deplorable state of agitation. His face, ordinarily rubicund, bore traces of a sleepless night; indeed, it was plain that he had not changed his clothes since leaving the Assembly Rooms, where he invariably spent his evenings at a game of *faro* for modest stakes. He grasped my hand, springing up to do so from a writing-table whereon lay several sheets of foolscap paper.

"Ah! my dear friend, you are late!" was his greeting.

"I thought I had been moderately expeditious," said I.

"Yes, yes—perhaps so." He consulted his watch. "But with an affair of this sort hanging over one, the minutes drag. And yet, Heaven knows, mine may be few enough."

"Pardon me," I said, "but to what sort of affair are you alluding?"

Digitized by Google

"An affair of honour," he answered tragically.

"Eh?" I said. "A duel! You have engaged yourself to fight a duel?" He nodded. "Then I will have nothing to do with it," I announced with decision.

"Aye," said he with marked irony, "it is at such a pinch that one discovers his true friends! But fortunately I had no sooner dispatched Gumbo in search of you than I foresaw some chance of this pusillanimity of which you give me proof."

"Pusillanimity?" I interjected. "It is nothing of the kind. But you seem to forget my position here as honorary physician to the Hotwells."

"We'll call it lukewarmness, then," he went on in yet more biting tones. "At the risk of seeming intrusive, I at once knocked up two Irish gentlemen on the landing above who had been audibly making a night of it while I sat here endeavouring to compose my thoughts to the calmness proper for framing a testamentary disposition. Although perfect strangers to me, they cheerfully granted what you have denied me; consented with alacrity—nay, with enthusiasm—to act as my seconds in this affair; and started to carry my cartel—which, having gone

Digitized by Google

to bed in their boots, they were able to do with the smallest possible delay."

"You have not yet told me the nature of the quarrel," I suggested.

His face at once resumed its wonted colour —nay, took on an extra tinge inclining to purple. "And I don't intend to!" he snapped.

"Then you no longer need my services?"

"Fortunately no, since you make such a pother of granting them. Stay—you might witness my will here, to which I am about to affix my signature."

"With pleasure," said I. "But who is to be the other witness? The law requires two, you know."

"Confound it—so it does! I had forgotten. We might ring up the Boots, eh?"

"Better avoid dragging the servants of the hotel into this business, especially if you would keep your intention secret. How about Gumbo?"

"He 's black, to begin with, and moreover he benefits under the document to the extent of a small legacy."

"That rules him out, at any rate. Ha!" I exclaimed, glancing out of window, "the very man!"

Digitized by Google

"Who?"

"An excellent fellow at this moment crossing the gardens towards the Mall—he is early this morning; a discreet, solid citizen, and able to keep his counsel as well as any man in the Hotwells; our leading jeweller, Mr. Jenkinson."

I turned sharply, for the Major had sunk into his chair with a groan.

"Jenkinson!" he gasped. "Jenkinson! The man's insatiable—he has been watching the hotel in his lust for blood! He threatened last night to cut my liver out and give it to the crows—my unfortunate liver on which you, doctor, have wasted so much solicitude. He used the most extraordinary language—not," the Major added, gripping the arms of his chair and sitting erect, "not that he shall find me slow in answering his threats."

"My dear Major," I cried, "under what delusion are you labouring? Mr. Jenkinson, believe me, is incapable of hurting a fly. You must have mistaken your man. Come and see him for yourself." And drawing him to the window, I pointed after the figure of the retreating jeweller.

Digitized by Google

The Major's brow cleared. "No," he admitted, "that is not in the least like him. Still, he gave me his name as Jenkinson. Oh! decidedly that is not the man."

"The name is not uncommon," said I. "Excuse me, I must hurry, or he will be out of sight!" And I ran downstairs and out into the street as Mr. Jenkinson disappeared around the corner. Following briskly, I brought him into sight again a moment before he turned aside into a small tavern—"The Lamb and the Flag"—half-way down the Mall.

Now "The Lamb and the Flag" enjoyed a low reputation, and for a citizen of ordinary respectability to be seen entering it at that hour —well, it invited surmise. But I knew Mr. Jenkinson to be above suspicion; he might be the ground-landlord—I had heard of his purchasing several small bits of property about the town. In short, it was almost with consternation that, following into the dirty bar, I surprised him in the act of raising a glass of brandy to his lips with a trembling hand.

I certainly took him aback, and he almost dropped the glass. "Excuse me, Dr. Frampton," he stammered, "pray do not think—this

Digitized by Google

indulgence—not a habit, I assure you. Oh, doctor! I have passed a fearful night!"

"Indeed?" said I sympathetically. "If my services can be of use——"

"No, no," he interrupted, paused, and seemed to consider. "At least, not yet."

"It seems, then, that I am doubly inopportune," I said, "for I have been following you to ask a small favour—not for myself, but for a certain Major Dignum, at the Grand Pump Hotel; nothing more than the attesting of a signature—a mere matter of form."

"Major Dignum? Ah, yes! the name is familiar to me from the *Courant's* Visitors' List." Mr. Jenkinson passed an agitated hand across his forehead. "I cannot recall seeing him in my shop. By all means, doctor—to oblige the gentleman—in my unhappy frame of mind—it will be a—a distraction."

So back I led the jeweller, explaining on the way how I had caught sight of him from the hotel window, and ushered him up to the apartment where the Major sat impatiently awaiting us.

"Good morning, sir," the Major began, with a bow. "So your name's Jenkinson? Most extraordinary! I—I am pleased to hear it, sir."

Digitized by Google

"Extraordinary!" the Major repeated, as he bent over the papers to sign them. "I am asking you, Mr. Jenkinson, to witness this signature to my last will and testament. In the midst of life—by the way, what is your Christian name?"

"William, sir."

"Incredible!" The Major bounced up from his chair and sat down again trembling, while he fumbled with his waistcoat pocket. "Ah, no!—to be sure—I gave it to my seconds," he muttered. "In the midst of life——"

"You may well say so, sir!" The jeweller took a seat and adjusted his spectacles as I sanded the Major's signature and pushed the document across the table. "A man," Mr. Jenkinson continued, dipping his pen wide of the ink-pot, "on the point of exchanging time for eternity——"

"That thought is peculiarly unpleasant to me just now," the Major interrupted. "May I beg you not to enlarge upon it?"

"But I *must*, sir!" cried out Mr. Jenkinson, as though the words were wrested from him by an inward agony; and tearing open his coat, he plucked a packet of folded papers from his breast-pocket and slapped it down

Digitized by Google

upon the table. "You have called me in, gentlemen, to witness a will. I ask you in return to witness mine—which must be at least ten times as urgent."

"Another will!" I glanced at the Major, who stared wildly about him, but could only mutter: "Jenkinson! William Jenkinson!"

"To-morrow, sir," pursued the jeweller, his voice rising almost to a scream, "you may have forgotten the transient fears which drove you to this highly proper precaution. For you the sun will shine, the larks sing, your blood will course with its accustomed liveliness, and your breast expand to the health-giving breeze. I don't blame you for it—oh, dear, no! not in the least. But you will admit it's a totally different thing to repose beneath the churchyard sod on a mere point of honour, with an assassin's bullet in your heart—not to mention that he threatened to tear it out and fling it to the crows!"

"The deuce!" shouted the Major, "your heart, did you say?"

"I did, sir."

"You are quite sure! Your heart?—you are certain it was your heart? Not your liver? Think, man!"

Digitized by Google

"He did not so much as allude to that organ, sir, though I have no doubt he was capable of it."

While we gazed upon one another, lost in a maze of extravagant surmise, a riotous rush of feet took the staircase by storm, and the door crashed open before two hilarious Irishmen, of whom the spokesman wore the reddest thatch of hair it has ever been my lot to cast eyes on. The other, so far as I can remember, confined his utterances to frequent, vociferous, and wholly inarticulate cries of the chase.

The Major presented them to us as Captain Tom O'Halloran and Mr. Finucane.

"And we've had the divvle's own luck, Major, dear," announced Tom O'Halloran. "The blayguard's from home. Ah, now! don't be dispirited, 'tis an early walk he's after takin'; at laste, that's what the slip of a gurrl towld us who answered the door; and mighty surprised she seemed to open it to a pair of customers at such an hour. For what d'ye suppose he calls himself when he's at home? A jooler, sorr; a dirthy jooler."

"A jeweller!" I cried aloud,

Digitized by Google

"No more, no less. Says I, there's quare gentlefolks going in these times, but I don't cool my heels waitin' in a jooler's shop with a challenge for the principal when he chooses to walk in to business. So I said to the gurrl: 'You may tell your master,' I said, 'there's two gentlemen have called, and will have his blood yet in a bottle,' I said; 'but any time will do between this and to-morrow.' And with that I came away. But Mr. Finucane here suggested that, whilst we were at it, we might save time and engage the surgeon. So on our way back we rang up Dr. Frampton. No luck again; the doctor was out. Faix! early walkin' seems the fashion at this health resort. But we've brought along his assistant, if that's any use to you, and he's downstairs at this moment on the door-mat."

The captain put his head outside and whistled. Mr. Finucane assisted with a life-like imitation of a coach-horn, and Mr. MacRea, thus summoned, appeared upon the threshold.

I cannot accurately describe what followed, for the jeweller, by casting himself into my arms, engaged a disproportionate share of my attention. I believe the Major caught

Digitized by Google

up a loo table and held it before him as a shield.

* * * * *

"You see," said Mr. MacRea, that afternoon, as I escorted him to the office of the Bath Coaching Company, to book his seat for that city, "on arriving at the Hotwells last evening, I naturally wished, Dr. Frampton, to assure myself that your position as a medical man answered to the glowing descriptions of it in your correspondence. I could think of no better method to arrive at this than by mingling with the gay throng in the Assembly Rooms; and I deemed that to take a hand at cards at the public tables would be the surest way to overhear the chit-chat of the fashionable world, and maybe elicit its opinion of you. But alas, sir! a man cannot play at the cards without exposing himself to the risk of losing. At the first table I lost—not heavily indeed, yet considerably. I rose and changed to another table; again I lost—this time the last sixpence in my pocket. Now, it is an idiosyncrasy of mine, maybe, but I cannot lose at the cards without losing also my temper; and the form it takes with me, Dr. Frampton,

Digitized by Google

is too often an incontrollable impulse to pull the winner's nose. I have argued with myself against this tendency a score of times, but it will not be denied. So, sir, last night, penniless and in a foreign land, I paced to and fro beneath the trees in front of the Assembly Rooms, and when this Mr. Jenkinson emerged, I accosted him and pulled his nose. To my astonishment he gave me a ticket and assured me that I should hear from him. Sir, we have no such practice at Largs, but it is my desire to conform with the customs of this country, especially in matters of etiquette. Consequently, after pulling the second gentleman's nose, I handed him the first gentleman's ticket, having none of my own and being ignorant (in the darkness) that it bore the first gentleman's name. It was a mischance, sir, but so far as I can see one that might have happened to anybody. You say that even after apologising—for on reflection I am always willing to apologise for any conduct into which my infirmity of temper may have betrayed me—it is impossible for me to continue here as your assistant. I am glad, then, that prudence counselled me to provide two

Digitized by Google

strings to my bow, and engage myself to Dr. Mathers of Bath, on the chance that you proved unsatisfactory; and I thank you for the month's salary, which I could not perhaps claim under the circumstances as a right, but which I am happy to accept as a favour."

Digitized by Google

Cleeve Court

CLEEVE COURT, known now as Cleeve Old Court, sits deep in a valley beside a brook and a level meadow, across which it looks southward upon climbing woods and glades descending here and there between them like broad green rivers. Above, the valley narrows almost to a gorge, with scarps of limestone, grey and red-streaked, jutting sheer over its alder beds and fern-screened waterfalls; and so zigzags up to the mill and hamlet of Ipplewell, beyond which spread the moors. Below, it bends southward and widens gradually for a mile to the market-town of Cleeve Abbots, where by a Norman bridge of ten arches its brook joins a large river, and their waters, scarcely mingled, are met by the sea tides, spent and warm with crawling over the sandbanks of a six-mile estuary.

Cleeve Old Court sees neither the limestone crags above nor the town below, but

Digitized by Google

sits sequestered in its own bend of the valley, in its own clearing amid the heavy elms; so sheltered that, even in March and November, when the wind sings aloft on the ridges, the smoke mounts straight from its chimneys and the trees drip as steadily as though they were clocks and marked the seconds perfunctorily, with no real interest in the lapse of time. For the house, with its round-shouldered Jacobean gables, its stone-cropped roof, lichen-spotted plaster, and ill-kept yew hedge, has an air of resignation to decay, well-bred but spiritless, and communicates it to the whole of its small landscape. Our old builders chose their sites for shelter rather than for view; and this—and perhaps a well of exquisite water bubbling by the garden gate on the very lip of the brook—must explain the situation of the Old Court. Its present owner—being inordinately rich—had abandoned it to his bailiff, and built himself a lordly barrack on the ridge, commanding views that stretch from the moors to the sea. For this nine out of ten would commend him; but no true à Cleeve would ever have owned so much of audacity or disowned so much of tradition,

Digitized by Google

and he has wasted a compliment on the perished family by assuming its name.

The last à Cleeve who should have inherited Cleeve Court returned to it for the last time on a grey and dripping afternoon in 1805 —on the same day and at the same hour, in fact, when, hundreds of miles to the southward, our guns were banging to victory off Cape Trafalgar. Here, at home, on the edge of the Cleeve woods, the air hung heavy and soundless, its silence emphasised rather than broken now and again by the *kuk-kuk* of a pheasant in the undergrowth. Above the plantations, along the stubbled uplands, long inert banks of vapour hid the sky-line; and out of these Walter à Cleeve came limping across the ridge, his figure looming unnaturally.

He limped because he had walked all the way from Plymouth in a pair of French sabots —a penitential tramp for a youth who loathed walking at the best of times. He knew his way perfectly, although he followed no path; yet, coming to the fringe of the woodland, he turned aside and skirted the fence as if unexpectedly headed off by it. And this behaviour seemed highly suspicious to Jim Burdon, the under-keeper, who, not recog-

Digitized by Google

nising his young master, decided that here was a stranger up to no good.

Jim's mind ran on poachers this year. Indeed he had little else to brood over and very little else to discuss with Macklin, the head-keeper. The Cleeve coverts had come to a pretty pass, and, as things were going, could only end in worse. Here they were close on the third week in October, and not a gun had been fired. Last season it had been bad enough, and indeed ever since the black day which brought news that young Mr. Walter was a prisoner among the French. No more shooting-parties, no more big beats, no more handsome gratuities for Macklin and windfalls for Jim Burdon! Nevertheless, the Squire, with a friend or two, had shot the coverts after a fashion. The blow had shaken him: uncertainty, anxiety of this sort for his heir and only child, must prey upon any man's mind. Still (his friends argued) the cure lay in his lifelong habits; these were the firm ground on which he would feel his footing again and recover himself—since, if so colourless a man could be said to nurse a passion, it was for his game. A strict Tory by breeding, and less by any process of

Digitized by Google

intellectual conviction than from sheer inability to see himself in any other light, indolent and contemptuous of politics, in game-preserving alone he let his Toryism run into activity, even to a fine excess. The Cleeve coverts, for instance, harboured none but pheasants of the old pure breed, since extinct in England—the true Colchian—and the Squire was capable of maintaining that these not only gave honester sport (whatever he meant by this), but were better eating than any birds of later importation (which was absurd). The appearance —old Macklin declared—of a single green-plumed or white-ringed bird within a mile of Cleeve Court was enough to give him a fit: certainly it would irritate him more than any poacher could—though poachers, too, were poison.

When first the Squire took to neglecting his guns all set it down to a passing dejection of spirit. He alone knew that he nursed a wound incurable unless his son returned, and that this distaste was but an early stage in his ailing. Being a man of reserved and sensitive soul, into which no fellow-creature had been allowed to look, he told his secret to no one, not even to his wife. She—a Roman Catholic

Digitized by Google

and devout—had lived for many years almost entirely apart from him, occupying her own rooms, divided between her books and the spiritual consolations of Father Halloran, who had a lodging at the Court and a board of his own. In spite of the priest's demure eye and neat Irish wit, the three made a melancholy household.

"As melancholy as a nest of gib cats," said old Macklin. "And I feel it coming over me at nights up at my cottage. How's a man to sleep, knowing the whole place so scandalously overstocked—the birds that tame they run between your legs—and no leave to use a gun, even to club 'em into good manners?"

"Leave it to Charley Hannaford," growled Jim bitterly. "He'll soon weed us out neat and clean. I wonder the Squire don't pay him for doing our work."

The head-keeper looked up sharply. "Know anything?" he asked laconically.

Jim answered one question with another. "See Hannaford's wife in church last Sunday?"

"Wasn't there—had too much to employ me walking the coverts. I believe a man's duty comes before his church-going at this time o'

Digitized by Google

year; but I suppose there 's no use to argue with a lad when he 's courting."

"Courting or not, I was there; and, what 's more, I had it reckoned up for me how much money Bess Hannaford wore on her back. So even going to church may come in useful, Sam Macklin, if a man 's got eyes in his head."

"Argyments!" sniffed the head-keeper. "You 'll be some time lagging Charley Hannaford with argyments. Coverts is coverts, my son, and Bow Street is Bow Street. Keep 'em separate."

"Stop a minute. That long-legg'd boy of his is home from service at Exeter. Back in the summer I heard tell he was getting on famous as a footman, and liked his place. Seems to have changed his mind, or else the Hannafords are settin' up a footman of their own." (Jim, when put out, had a gift of sarcasm.)

"Bow Street again," said Macklin stolidly, puffing at his pipe. "Anything more?"

"Well, yes"—Jim at this point began to drawl his words—"you 've cast an eye, no doubt, over the apple heaps in Hannaford's back orchard?"

Digitized by Google

Macklin nodded.

"Like the looks o' them?"

"Not much. Anything more?"

Jim's gaze wandered carelessly to the horizon, and his drawl grew slower yet as he led up to his triumph. "Not much—only I took a stroll down to town Saturday night, and dropped in upon Bearne, the chemist. Hannaford had been there that afternoon buying nux vomica."

"No?" The elder man was startled, and showed it. "The gormed rascal! That was a clever stroke of yours, though, I will say."

Jim managed to conceal his satisfaction with a frown. "If I don't get a charge of buckshot somewhere into Charles Hannaford between this and Christmas I'm going to enlist!" he announced.

But Macklin did not hear, being occupied for the moment with this new evidence of Hannaford's guile, which he contemplated, be it said, more dispassionately than did Jim. In Jim there rankled a venomous personal grudge, dating from the day when, having paid an Exeter taxidermist for a beautifully stuffed *Phasianus colchicus*, he had borne the bird home, cunningly affixed it to a roosting-

Digitized by Google

bough, and left it there looking as natural as life. On arriving at the tree early next morning he found Macklin (to whom he had not imparted the secret) already there, and staring aloft with a puzzled grin. Someone had decorated the bird during the night with a thin collar of white linen. "Very curious," explained Macklin; "I got a 'nonamous letter last night, pushed under my door, and tellin' me there was a scandalous ring-necked bird roosting hereabouts. The fellow went on to say 'he wouldn't have troubled me but for knowing the Squire to be so particular set against this breed, and wound up by signing himself 'Yours truly, A WELL-WISHER.'"

The worse of it was that Macklin found the joke too good to keep it to himself: by this time the whole countryside knew of Jim's visit to the "tackydermatist," and maddening allusions to it had kept Jim's temper raw and his fists pretty active.

So it was that, on the misty afternoon when young Mr. Walter à Cleeve passed him unawares, Jim had been standing for twenty minutes flat against a tree on the upper outskirts of the plantation, sunk in a brown study.

Digitized by Google

The apparition startled him, for the thick air deadened the sound of footsteps; and the sound, when it fell on his ears, held something unfamiliar. (Jim was unacquainted with sabots.) He stood perfectly still, let it go by, and at once prepared to follow—not that his suspicions connected this stranger with Charley Hannaford, who habitually worked alone, but because the man's gait ("He lopped like a hare," said Jim afterwards) and peculiar slouch of the shoulders somehow aroused his misgivings. Who could this be? And what might be his business that he followed no path, yet seemed to be walking with a purpose?

A shallow ditch ran along the inner side of the fence, clear of undergrowth and half filled with rotted leaves. Along this Jim followed, gun in hand, keeping his quarry's head and shoulders well in sight over the coping. This was laborious work, for he plunged ankle-deep at every step; but the leaves, sodden with a week's rain, made a noiseless carpet, whereas the brushwood might have crackled and betrayed him.

Walter à Cleeve limped forward, not once turning his head. These were his paternal acres, and he knew every inch of them, almost

Digitized by Google

every spot of lichen along the fence. Abroad he had dreamed of them, night after night; but he did not pause to regreet them now, for his thoughts were busy ahead, in the Court now directly beneath him in the valley; and in his thoughts he was there already, announcing himself, facing his mother in her unchanged room, and his father in the library.

Amid these thoughts (and they were anxious ones) he reached the point for which he had been steering, a platform of rock and thin turf from which a limestone cliff, parting the woods, descended almost sheer to the valley. The White Rock it was called, and as a child Walter à Cleeve had climbed about it a score of times in search of madrepores; for a gully ran down beside it, half choked with fern and scree, and from the gully here and there a ledge ran out across the cliff-face, otherwise inaccessible. The gully itself, though daunting at first sight, gave, in fact, a short cut down to the meadows above Cleeve Court, easy and moderately safe. Walter à Cleeve plunged into it without hesitation.

Now it so happened that at this moment, some fifty yards down the gully, and well screened by the overhanging rock, Charley

Digitized by Google

Hannaford was crouching with a wire in his hand. Even had you known his whereabouts and his business, it would have been hard to stalk Charley Hannaford single-handed on the face of the White Rock. But the wiliest poacher cannot provide against such an accident as this—that a young gentleman, supposed to be in France, should return by an unfrequented path, and by reason of an awkward French boot catch his toe and slide precipitately, without warning, down twenty feet of scree, to drop another six feet on to a grassy ledge. Yet this is just what happened. Charley Hannaford, already pricking up his ears at the unfamiliar footfall up the gully, had scarcely time to rise on his knees in readiness for retreat, when Walter à Cleeve came sprawling almost on top of him.

"Hallo!" gasped Walter, scarcely more confused by his fall than by the singular meeting. "Clumsy of me——" His eyes fell on the wire which Hannaford was stealthily trying to pocket, and grew wide with understanding. Then they sought the ground by Hannaford's feet, and glanced from that up to the fence of the plantation overhanging the far side of the gully.

Digitized by Google

"Well, Charles Hannaford, you don't look overjoyed to see me home again!"

The poacher grinned awkwardly. He was caught, for certain: nevertheless, his wariness did not desert him.

"You took me rather sudden, Mister Walter."

"That's fairly evident. Maize, eh?" He scooped a few grains into his palm and sniffed at them. "Better maize than my father's, no doubt. Where's Macklin?"

"Somewhere's about. I say, Mister Walter——"

"And Jim Burdon?"

"Near abouts, too. Be you goin' to tell on me?"

"Why on earth shouldn't I? It's robbery, you know, and I don't care any more than my father does for being robbed."

"That was a nasty tumble of yours, sir."

"Yes, I suppose it *was* something of a spill. But I'm not hurt, thank you."

"It might ha' been a sight worse," said Charley Hannaford reflectively. "A foot or two more, now—and the rock, if I remember, sloping outwards just here below." He

Digitized by Google

leaned his head sideways and seemed to drop a casual glance over the ledge.

Walter knew that the drop just there was a very nasty one indeed. "Oh, but yon's where I came over—I couldn't have fallen quite so wide——" he began to explain, and checked himself, reading the queer strained smile on Hannaford's face.

"I—I reckon we'll call it Providence, all the same," said the poacher.

Then Walter understood. The man was desperate, and *he*—he, Walter à Cleeve, was a coward.

Had he known it, across the gully a pair of eyes were watching. He had help within call. Jim Burdon had come to the upper end of the plantation a few seconds too late to witness the accident. By the time he reached the hedge there and peered over, Walter had disappeared; and Jim—considerably puzzled, half inclined to believe that the stranger had walked over the edge of the White Rock and broken his neck—worked his way down the lateral fence beside the gully, to be brought up standing by the sight of the man he sought, safe and sound, and apparently engaged in friendly chat with Charley Hannaford.

Digitized by Google

But Walter à Cleeve's back was turned towards the fence, and again Jim failed to recognise him. And Jim peered over the fence through a gorse-whin, undetected even by the poacher's clever eyes.

"It 's queer, too," went on Charley Hannaford slowly, as if chewing each word. "I hadn't even heard tell they was expectin' you, down at the Court."

"They are not," Walter answered. He scarcely thought of the words, which indeed seemed to him to be spoken by somebody else. He was even astonished at the firmness of their sound; but he knew that his face was white, and all the while he was measuring Hannaford's lithe figure, and calculating rapidly. Just here he stood at a disadvantage: a sidelong spring might save him: it would take but a second. On the other hand, if during that second or less . . . His eyes were averted from the verge, and yet he saw it, and his senses apprised every foot of the long fall beyond. While he thought it out, keeping tension on himself to meet Charley Hannaford's gaze with a deceptive indifference, his heart swelled at the humiliation of it all. He had escaped from a two years' captivity—

Digitized by Google

and, Heavens! how he had suffered over there, in France! He had run risks: his adventures —bating one unhappy blot upon them, which surely did not infect the whole— might almost be called heroic. And here he was, within a few hundred yards of home, ignominiously trapped. The worst of it was that death refused to present itself to him as possible. He knew that he could save himself by a word: he foresaw quite clearly that he was going to utter it. What enraged him was the equal certainty that a courageous man—one with the tradition he ought to have inherited—would behave quite differently. It was not death, but his own shameful cowardice, that he looked in the face during those moments.

Into the poacher's eyes there crept his habitual shifty smile. "You 'll have a lot to tell 'em down there, Mr. Walter, without troublin' about me."

The unhappy lad forced a laugh. "You might say so, if you knew what I 've been through. One doesn't escape out of France in these days without adventures, and mine would make pretty good reading."

"Surely, sir."

"But if I—if I overlook this affair, it 's not

Digitized by Google

to be a precedent, you understand. I intend to live at home now and look after the estate. My father will wish it."

"To be sure."

"And stealing's stealing. If I choose to keep my own counsel about this, you are not to suppose I shall forget it. The others suspect only, but I *know*; and henceforth I advise you to bear that in mind."

"And much obliged to you, sir. I know a gentleman and can trust his word."

"So the best advice I can give you is to turn over a new leaf." Walter turned to go with an air of careless magnanimity, conscious of the sorry part he was playing, yet not wholly without hope that it imposed upon the other. "I want to be friends with all my neighbours, you understand. Good-bye."

He nodded curtly and began to pick his way down the gully with a slowness almost ostentatious. And as he went he cursed his weakness, and broke off cursing to reconstruct the scene from the beginning and imagine himself carrying it off with contemptuous fearlessness, at hand-grips with Charley Hannaford and defying him. He would (he

Digitized by Google

felt) give the world to see the look Charley Hannaford flung after him.

The poacher's eyes did indeed follow him till he disappeared, but it would have taken a wise man to read them. After a meditative minute or so he coiled up his wire, pocketed it, and made off across the face of the rock by a giddy track which withdrew him at once from Jim Burdon's sight.

And Jim Burdon, pondering what he had seen, withdrew himself from hiding and went off to report to Macklin that Charley Hannaford had an accomplice, that the pair were laying snares on the White Rock, and that a little caution would lay them both by the heels.

Digitized by Google

II.

WALTER À CLEEVE did not arrive at the Court by the front entrance, but by a door which admitted to his mother's wing of the house, through the eastern garden secluded and reserved for her use. This was his way. From childhood he and his mother had lived in a sort of conspiracy—intending no guile, be it understood. She was a Roman Catholic. Her husband, good easy man, held to the Church of England, in which he had been bred; but held to it without bigotry, and supposed heaven within the reach of all who went through life cleanly and honourably. By consequence the lady had her way, and reared the boy in her own faith. She had delicate health, too—a weapon which makes a woman all but invincible when pitted against a man of delicate feeling.

The Squire, though shy, was affectionate. He sincerely loved his boy, and there was really no good reason why he and Walter should not open their hearts to one another. But somehow the religious barrier, which he did

Digitized by Google

his best to ignore, had gradually risen like an impalpable fence about him, and kept him a dignified exile in his own house. For years all the indoor servants, chosen by Mrs. à Cleeve, had been Roman Catholics. In his own sphere—in the management of the estate—he did as he wished; in hers he was less often consulted than Father Halloran, and had ceased to resent this, having stifled his first angry feelings and told himself that it did not become a man to wrangle with women and priests. He found it less tolerable that Walter and his mother laid their plans together before coming to him. Why? Good Heavens! (he reflected testily) the boy might come and ask for anything in reason, and welcome! To give, even after grumbling a bit, is one of a father's dearest privileges. But no: when Walter wanted anything—which was seldom—he must go to his mother and tell her, and his mother promised to "manage it." In his secret heart the Squire loathed this round-about management, and tried to wean Walter by consulting him frankly on the daily business of the estate. But no again: Walter seemingly cared little for these confidences: and again, although he learned to shoot and was a

Digitized by Google

fair horseman, he put no heart into his sports. His religion debarred him from a public school; or, rather—in Mrs. à Cleeve's view—it made all the public schools undesirable. When she first suggested Dinan (and in a way which convinced the Squire that she and Father Halloran had made up their minds months before), for a moment he feared indignantly that they meant to make a priest of his boy. But Mrs. à Cleeve resigned that prospect with a sigh. Walter must marry and continue the family. Nevertheless, when Great Britain formally renounced the Peace of Amiens, and Master Walter found himself among the *détenus*, his mother sighed again to think that, had he been designed for the priesthood, he would have escaped molestation; while his father no less ruefully cursed the folly which had brought him within Bonaparte's clutches.

Mrs. à Cleeve sat by her boudoir fire embroidering an altar frontal for the private chapel. At the sound of a footstep in the passage she stopped her work with a sharp contraction of the heart: even the clattering wooden shoes could not wholly disguise that footstep for her. She was rising from her deep chair as Walter opened the door; but sank

Digitized by Google

back trembling, and put a hand over her white face.

"Mother!"

It was he. He was kneeling: she felt his hands go about her waist and his head sink in her lap.

"Oh, Walter! Oh, my son!"

"Mother!" he repeated with a sob. She bent her face and kissed him.

"Those horrible clothes—you have suffered! But you have escaped! Tell me——"

In broken sentences he began to tell her.

"You have seen your father?" she asked, interrupting him.

"Not yet. I have seen nobody: I came straight to you."

"He is greatly aged."

There came a knock at the door, and Father Halloran stood on the threshold confounded.

The priest was a tall and handsome Irishman, white-haired, with a genial laughing eye, and a touch of grave wisdom behind his geniality.

"Walter, dear lad! For the love of the saints tell us—how does this happen?"

Walter began his story again. The mother gazed into his face in a rapture. But the

Digitized by Google

priest's brow, at first jolly, little by little contracted with a puzzled frown.

"I don't altogether understand," he said. "They scarcely watched you at all, it seems?"

"Thank God for their carelessness!" put in Mrs. à Cleeve fervently.

"And you escaped. There was nothing to prevent? They hadn't exacted any sort of parole?"

"Well, there was a sort of promise"—the boy flushed hotly—"not what you'd call a real promise. The fellow—a sort of prefect in a tricolour sash—had us up in a room before him, and gabbled through some form of words that not one of us rightly understood. I heard afterwards some pretty stories of this gentleman. He had been a contractor to the late Republic, in horse-forage, and had swindled the Government (people said) to the tune of some millions of francs. Marengo finished him: he had been speculating against it on the sly, which lost his plunder and the most of his credit. On the remains of it he had managed to scrape into this prefecture. A nice sort of man to administer oaths!"

Father Halloran turned impatiently to the window, and, leaning a hand on one of the

Digitized by Google

stone mullions, gazed out upon the small garden. Daylight was failing, and the dusk out there on the few autumn flowers seemed one with the chill shadow touching his hopes and robbing them of colour. He shivered: and as with a small shiver men sometimes greet a deadly sickness, so Father Halloran's shiver presaged the doom of a life's hope. He had been Walter's tutor, and had built much on the boy: he had read warnings from time to time, and tried at once to obey them and persuade himself that they were not serious—that his anxiety magnified them. If honour could be inherited, it surely ran in Walter's blood; in honour—the priest could assert with a good conscience—he had been instructed. And yet——

The lad had turned to his mother, and went on with a kind of sullen eagerness: "There were sixteen of us, including an English clergyman, his wife and two young children, and a young couple travelling on their honeymoon. It wasn't as if they had taken our word and let us go: they marched us off at once to special quarters—billeted us all in one house, over a greengrocer's shop, with a Government *concierge* below stairs to keep

Digitized by Google

watch on our going and coming. A roll was called every night at eight—you see, there was no liberty about it. The whole thing was a fraud. Father Halloran may say what he likes, but there are two sides to a bargain; and if one party breaks faith, what becomes of the other's promise?"

Mrs. à Cleeve cast a pitiful glance at Father Halloran's back. The priest neither answered nor turned.

"Besides, they stole my money. All that father sent passed through the prefect's hands and again through the *concierge's;* yes, and was handled by half a dozen other rascals, perhaps, before ever it reached me. They didn't even trouble themselves to hide the cheat. One week I might be lucky and pick up a whole louis; the next I'd be handed five francs and an odd sou or two, with a grin."

"And all the while your father was sending out your allowance as usual—twenty pounds to reach you on the first of every month—and Dickinson's agents in Paris sending back assurances that it would be transmitted and reach you as surely as if France and England were at peace!"

Father Halloran caught the note of anxious

Digitized by Google

justification in Mrs. à Cleeve's voice, and knew that it was meant for him. He turned now with a half audible "Pish!" but controlled his features—superfluously, since he stood now with his back to the waning light.

"Have you seen him?" he asked abruptly.

"Seen whom?"

"Your father."

"I came around by the east door, meaning to surprise mother. I only arrived here two minutes before you knocked."

"For God's sake answer me 'yes' or 'no,' like a man!" thundered Father Halloran, suddenly giving vent to his anger: as suddenly checking it with a tight curb, he addressed Mrs. à Cleeve. "Your pardon!" said he.

The woman almost whimpered. She could not use upon her confessor the card of weak nerves she would have played at once and unhesitatingly upon her husband. "I think you are horribly unjust," she said. "God knows how I have looked forward to this moment: and you are spoiling all! One would say you are not glad to see our boy back!"

The priest ignored the querulous words. "You must see your father at once," he said

Digitized by Google

gravely. "At once," he repeated, noting how Walter's eyes sought his mother's.

"Of course, if you think it wise——" she began.

"I cannot say if it be wise—in your meaning. It is his duty."

"We can go with him——"

"No."

"But we might help to explain?"

Father Halloran looked at her with pity. "I think we have done that too often," he answered; and to himself he added: "She is afraid of him. Upon my soul, I am half afraid of him myself."

"You think his father will understand?" she asked, clutching at comfort.

"It depends upon what you mean by 'understanding.' It is better that Walter should go: afterwards I will speak to him." The priest seemed to hesitate before adding, "He loves the boy. By the way, Walter, you might tell us exactly how you escaped."

"The greengrocer's wife helped me," said Walter sullenly. "She had taken a sort of fancy to me, and—she understood the injustice of it better than Father Halloran seems to. She agreed that there was no wrong in

Digitized by Google

escaping. She had a friend at Yvignac, and it was agreed that I should walk out there early one morning and find a change of clothes ready. The master of the house earned his living by travelling the country with a small waggon of earthenware, and that night he carried me, hidden in the hay among his pitchers and flower-pots, as far as Lamballe. I meant to strike the coast westward, for the road to St. Malo would be searched at once as soon as the *concierge* reported me missing. From Lamballe I trudged through St. Brisac to Guingamp, hiding by day and walking by night, and at Guingamp called at the house of an onion-merchant, to whom I had been directed. At this season he works his business by hiring gangs of boys of all ages from fourteen to twenty, marching them down to Pampol or Morlaix, and shipping them up the coast to sell his onions along the Seine valley, or by another route southward from Étaples and Boulogne. I joined a party of six bound for Morlaix, and tramped all the way in these shoes with a dozen strings of onions slung on a stick across my shoulders. At Morlaix I shipped on a small trader, or so the skipper called it: he was bound, in fact, for Guernsey,

Digitized by Google

and laden down to the bulwarks with kegs of brandy, and at St. Peter's Port he handed me over to the captain of a Cawsand boat, with whom he did business. I'm giving you just the outline, you understand. I have been through some rough adventures in the last two weeks"—the lad paused and shivered—"but I don't ask you to think of that. The Cawsand skipper sunk his cargo last night about a mile outside the Rame, and just before daybreak set me ashore in Cawsand village. I have been walking ever since."

Father Halloran stepped to the bell-rope.

"Shall I ring? The boy should drink a glass of wine, I think, and then go to his father without delay."

Digitized by Google

III.

"SO far as I understand your story, sir, it leaves me with but one course. You will go at once to your room for the night, where a meal shall be sent to you. At eight o'clock to-morrow morning you will be ready to drive with me to Plymouth, where doubtless I shall discover, from the Officer Commanding, the promptest way of returning you to Dinan."

The Squire spoke slowly, resting his elbow on the library table and shading his eyes with his palm, under which, however, they looked out with fiery directness at Walter, standing upright before him.

The boy's face went white before his brain grasped the sentence. His first sense was of utter helplessness, almost of betrayal. From the day of his escape he had been conscious of a weak spot in his story. To himself he could justify his conduct throughout; and by dint of rehearsing over and over again the pros and contras, always as an advocate for the defence, he had persuaded himself at times that every sensible person must agree with

Digitized by Google

him. What consideration, to begin with, could any of the English *détenus* owe to Bonaparte, who by seizing them had broken the good faith between nations? Promises, again, are not unconditional; they hold so long as he to whom they are given abides by his counter-obligations, stated or implied. . . . Walter had a score of good arguments to satisfy himself. Nevertheless he had felt that to satisfy his father they would need to be well presented. He had counted on his mother's help and Father Halloran's. Why, for the first time in his life, had these two deserted him? Never in the same degree had he wanted their protection. His mind groped in a void. He felt horribly alone.

And yet, while he sought for reasons against this sentence, he knew the real reason to be that he could not face it. He hated suffering: a world which demanded suffering of him was wholly detestable, irrational, monstrous: he desired no more to do with it. What had he done to be used so? He knew himself for a harmless fellow, wishing hurt to no man. Then why on earth could he not be let alone? He had never asked to be born: he had no wish to live at all, if living involved all this misery.

Digitized by Google

It had been bad enough in Dinan before his escape; but to tread back that weary road in proclaimed dishonour, exposed to contemptuous eyes at every halting-place, and to take up the burden again plus the shame—it was unthinkable, and he came near to a hysterical laugh at the command. He felt as a horse might feel when spurred up to a fence which it cannot face and foresees it must refuse at the last moment.

"Return—return to Dinan?" he echoed, his white lips shaking on each word.

"Certainly you will return to Dinan. For God's sake——" The Squire checked himself, and his tenderness swelled suddenly above his scorn. He rose from the table, stepped to the boy, and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Walter," he said, "we have somehow managed to make a mess of it. You have behaved disreputably; and if the blame of it, starting from somewhere in the past, lies at your mother's door or mine, we must sorrowfully beg your pardon. The thing is done: it is reparable, but only through your suffering. You are the last à Cleeve, and with our faults we à Cleeves have lived cleanly and honourably. Be a man: take up this burden

Digitized by Google

which I impose, and redeem your honour. For your mother's sake and mine I could ask it: but how can we separate ourselves from you? Look in my face. Are there no traces in it of these last two years? Boy, boy, you have not been the only one to suffer! If further suffering of ours could help you, would it not be given? But a man's honour lies ultimately in his own hands. Go, lad—endure what you must—and God support you with the thought that we are learning pride in you!"

"It will kill me!"

The lad blurted it out with a sob. His father's hand dropped from his shoulder.

"Are you incapable of understanding that it might do worse?" he asked coldly, and turned his back in despair.

Walter went out unsteadily, fumbling his way.

The Squire dined alone that night, and after dinner sat long alone before his library fire—how long he scarcely knew; but Narracott, the butler, had put up the bolts and retired, leaving only the staircase-lantern burning, when Father Halloran knocked at the library door and was bidden to enter.

Digitized by Google

"I wished to speak with you about Walter—to learn your decision," he explained.

"You have not seen him?"

"Not since he came to explain himself."

"He is in his room, I believe. He is to be ready at eight to-morrow to start with me for Plymouth."

"I looked for that decision," said the priest, after a moment's silence.

"Would you have suggested another?" The question came sharp and stern; but a moment later the Squire mollified it, turning to the priest and looking him straight in the eyes. "Excuse me; I am sure you would not."

"I thank you," was the answer. "No: since I have leave to say so, I think you have taken the only right course."

The two men still faced one another. Fate had made them antagonists in this house, and the antagonism had lasted over many years. But no petulant word had ever broken down the barrier of courtesy between them: each knew the other to be a gentleman.

"Father Halloran," said the Squire gravely, "I will confess to you that I have been tempted. If I could honestly have spared the lad——"

Digitized by Google

"I know," said the priest, and nodded while Mr. à Cleeve seemed to search for a word. "If any sacrifice of your own could stand for payment, you could have offered it, sir."

"What I fear most is that it may kill his mother." The Squire said it musingly, but his voice held a question.

"She will suffer." The priest pondered his opinion as he gave it, and his words came irregularly by twos and threes. "It may be hard—for some while—to make her see the—the necessity. Women fight for their own by instinct—right or wrong, they do not ask themselves. If you reason, they will seize upon any sophistry to confute you—to persuade themselves. Doubtless the instinct comes from God; but to men, sometimes, it makes them seem quite unscrupulous."

"We have built much upon Walter. If our hopes have come down with a crash, we must rebuild, and build them better. I think that, for the future, you and I must consult one another and make allowances. The fact is, I am asking you—as it were—to make terms with me over the lad. 'A house divided,' you know. . . Let us have an end of divisions. I am feeling terribly old to-night."

Digitized by Google

The priest met his gaze frankly, and had half extended his hand, when a sudden sound arrested him—a sound at which the eyes of both men widened with surprise and their lips were parted—the sharp report of a gun. Not until it shattered the silence of the woods around Cleeve Court could you have been aware how deep the silence had lain. Its echoes banged from side to side of the valley, and in the midst of their reverberation a second gun rang out.

"The mischief!" exclaimed the Squire. "That means poachers, or I 'm a Dutchman. Macklin 's in trouble. Will you come?" He stepped quickly to the door. "Where did you fix the sound? Somewhere up the valley, near the White Rock, eh?"

Father Halloran's face was white as a ghost's. "It—it was outside the house," he stammered.

"Outside? What the deuce——Of course it was outside!" He paused, and seemed to read the priest's thought. "Oh, for God's sake, man——" Hurrying into the passage, and along it to the hall, he called up, "Walter! Walter!" from the foot of the staircase. "There, you see!" he muttered, as Walter's voice answered from above.

Digitized by Google

But almost on the instant a woman's voice took up the cry. "Walter! What has happened to Walter?" and as her son stepped out upon the landing Mrs. à Cleeve came tottering through the corridor leading to her rooms—came in disarray, a dressing-gown hastily caught about her, and a wisp of grey hair straggling across her shoulder. Catching sight of Walter, she almost fell into his arms.

"Thank God! Thank God you are safe!"

"But what on earth is the matter?" demanded Walter, scarcely yet aroused from the torpor of his private misery.

"Poachers, no doubt." his father answered. "Macklin has been warning me of this for some time. Take your mother back to her room. There is no cause for alarm, Lucetta —if the affair were serious, we should have heard more guns before this. You had best return to bed at once. When I learn what has happened I will bring you word."

He strode away down the lower corridor, calling as he went to Narracott, the butler, to fetch a lantern and unbolt the hall-door, and entered the gunroom with Father Halloran at his heels.

"I cannot ask you to take a hand in this,"

Digitized by Google

he said, finding his favourite gun and noiselessly disengaging it from the rack, pitch dark though the room was.

"I may carry a spare weapon for you, I hope?"

"Ah, you will go with me? Thank you: I shall be glad of someone to carry the lantern. We may have to do some scrambling: Narracott is infirm, and Roger"—this was the footman—"is a chicken-hearted fellow, I suspect."

The two men armed themselves and went back to the hall, where Father Halloran in silence took the lantern from the butler. Then they stepped out into the night.

Masses of cloud obscured the stars, and the two walked forward into a wall of darkness which the rays of the priest's lantern pierced for a few yards ahead. Here in the valley the night air lay stagnant: scarcely a leaf rustled: their ears caught no sound but that of the brook alongside of which they mounted the coombe.

"Better set down the lantern and stand wide of it," said the Squire, as they reached the foot of the White Rock gully. "If they are armed, and mean business, we are only

Digitized by Google

offering them a shot." He paused at the sound of a quick, light footstep behind him, not many paces away, and wheeled about. "Who's there?" he challenged in a low, firm voice.

"It's I, father." Walter, also with a gun under his arm, came forward and halted in the outer ring of light.

"H'm," the Squire muttered testily. "Better you were in bed, I should say. This may be a whole night's business, and you have a long journey before you to-morrow."

The boy's face was white: he seemed to shiver at his father's words, and Father Halloran, accustomed to read his face, saw, or thought he saw—years afterwards told himself that he saw—a hunted, desperate look in it, as of one who forces himself into the company he most dreads rather than remain alone with his own thoughts. And yet, whenever he remembered this look, always he remembered too that the lad's jaw had closed obstinately, as though upon a resolve long in making but made at last.

But as the three stood there a soft whistle sounded from the bushes across the gully,

Digitized by Google

and Jim Burdon pushed a ghostly face into the penumbra.

"Is that you, sir? Then we'll have them for sure."

"Who is it, Jim?"

"Hannaford and that long-legged boy of his. Macklin's up a-top keeping watch, sir. I've winged one of 'em; can't be sure which. If you and his Reverence——"

Jim paused suddenly, with his eyes on the half-lit figure of Walter à Cleeve, recognising him not only as his young master, supposed to be in France, but as the stranger he had seen that afternoon talking with Hannaford. For Walter had changed only his sabots.

The Squire saw and interpreted his dismay. "Go on, man," he said hoarsely; "it's no ghost."

Jim's face cleared. "Your servant, Mr. Walter! A rum mistake I made then, this afternoon; but it's all right as things turn out. They're both hereabout, sir, somewheres on the face of the rock, and the one of 'em hurt, I reckon. Macklin'll keep the top: there's no way off the west side; and if you and his Reverence 'll work up along

Digitized by Google

the gully here while I try up the face, we'll have the pair for a certainty. Better douse the light though; I've a bull's-eye here that'll search every foot of the way, and they haven't a gun."

"That's right enough," the Squire answered; "but it's foolishness to douse the light. We'll set it up on the stones here at the mouth of the gully while Walter and I work up to the left of the gully and you up the rock. It will light up their only bolt-hole; and if you, Father Halloran, will keep an eye on it from the bushes here you will have light enough to see their faces to swear by before they reach it. No need to shoot: only keep your eyes open before they come abreast of it; for they'll make for it at once, to kick it over—if they risk a bolt this way, which I doubt."

"Why not let me try up the gully between you and Jim?" Walter suggested.

His father considered a moment. "Very well, I'll flank you on the left up the hedge, and Jim will take the rock. You're pretty sure they're there, Jim?"

"I'd put a year's wages on it," answered Jim.

So the three began their climb. At his

Digitized by Google

post below Father Halloran judged from the pace at which Walter started that he would soon lead the others; for Jim had a climb to negotiate which was none too easy, even by daylight, and the Squire must fetch a considerable *détour* before he struck the hedge, along which, moreover, he would be impeded by brambles and undergrowth. He saw this, but it was too late to call a warning.

Walter, beyond reach of the lantern's rays, ascended silently enough, but at a gathering pace. He forgot the necessity of keeping in line. It did not occur to him that his father must be dropping far behind: rather, his presence seemed beside him, inexorable, dogging him with the morrow's unthinkable compulsion. What mad adventure was this? Here he was at home hunting Charley Hannaford. Well, but his father was close at hand, and Father Halloran just below, who had always protected him. At this game he could go on for ever, if only it would stave off to-morrow. To-morrow——

A couple of lithe arms went about him in the darkness. A voice spoke hoarse and quick in his ear—spoke, though for the moment he was chiefly aware of its hot breath.

Digitized by Google

"Broke your word, did ye? Set them on to us, you blasted young sprig! Look 'ee here—I've a knife to your ribs, and you can't use your gun. Stand still while my boy slips across, or I 'll cut your white heart out. . ."

Walter à Cleeve stood still. He felt, rather than heard, a figure limp by and steal across the gully. A slight sound of a little loose earth dribbling reached him a moment later from the opposite bank of the gully. Then, after a long pause, the arms about him relaxed. Charles Hannaford was gone.

Still Walter à Cleeve did not move. He stared up into the wall of darkness on his left, wondering stupidly why his father did not shoot.

Then he put out his hand: it encountered a bramble bush.

He drew a long spray of the bramble towards him, fingering it very carefully, following the spines of its curved prickles, and, having found its leafy end, drew it meditatively through the trigger-guard of his gun.

* * * * *

The countryside scoffed at the finding of the coroner's jury that the last heir of the à Cleeves had met his death by misadventure.

Digitized by Google

Shortly after the inquest Charley Hannaford disappeared with his family, and this lent colour to their gossip. But Jim Burdon, who had been the first to arrive on the scene, told his plain tale, and, for the rest, kept his counsel. And so did Father Halloran and the Squire.

Digitized by Google

The Collaborators

OR, THE COMEDY THAT WROTE ITSELF
AS RELATED BY G. A. RICHARDSON

I.

How pleasant it is to have money, heigho!
How pleasant it is to have money!

sings I think) Clough. Well, I had money, and more of it than I felt any desire to spend; which is as much as any reasonable man can want. My age was five-and-twenty, my health good, my conscience moderately clean, and my appetite excellent: I had fame in some degree, and a fair prospect of adding to it: and I was unmarried. In later life a man may seek marriage for its own sake, but at five-and-twenty he marries against his will—because he has fallen in love with a woman; and this had not yet happened to me. I was a bachelor, and content to remain one.

To come to smaller matters—The month was early June, the weather perfect, the

Digitized by Google

solitude of my own choosing, and my posture comfortable enough to invite drowsiness. I had bathed and, stretched supine in the shade of a high sand-bank, was smoking the day's first cigarette. Behind me lay Ambleteuse; before me, the sea. On the edge of it, their shrill challenges softened by the distance to music, a score of children played with spades and buckets, innocently composing a hundred pretty groups of brown legs, fluttered hair, bright frocks and jerseys, and innocently conspiring with morning to put a spirit of youth into the whole picture. Beyond them the blue sea flashed with its own smiles, and the blue heaven over them with the glancing wings of gulls. On this showing it is evident that I, George Anthony Richardson, ought to have been happy; whereas, in fact, Richardson was cheerful enough, but George Anthony restless and ill-content: by reason that Richardson, remembering the past, enjoyed by contrast the present, and knew himself to be jolly well off; while George Anthony, likewise remembering the past, felt gravely concerned for the future.

Let me explain. A year ago I had been a clerk in the Office of the Local Government

Digitized by Google

Board—a detested calling with a derisory stipend. It was all that a University education (a second in Moderations and a third in *Literae Humaniores*) had enabled me to win, and I stuck to it because I possessed no patrimony and had no "prospects" save one, which stood precariously on the favour of an uncle—my mother's brother, Major-General Allan McIntosh, C.B. Now the General could not be called an indulgent man. He had retired from active service to concentrate upon his kinsfolk those military gifts which even on the wide plains of Hindostan had kept him the terror of his country's foes and the bugbear of his own soldiery. He had an iron sense of discipline and a passion for it; he detested all forms of amusement; in religion he belonged to the sect of the Peculiar People; and he owned a gloomy house near the western end of the Cromwell Road, where he dwelt and had for butler, valet, and factotum a Peculiar Person named Trewlove.

In those days I found my chief recreation in the theatre; and by-and-by, when I essayed to write for it, and began to pester managers with curtain-raisers, small vaudevilles, comic libretti and the like, you will guess that in

Digitized by Google

common prudence I called myself by a *nom de guerre*. Dropping the "Richardson," I signed my productions "George Anthony," and as "George Anthony" the playgoing public now discusses me. For some while, I will confess, the precaution was superfluous, the managers having apparently entered into league to ensure me as much obscurity as I had any use for. But at length in an unguarded moment the manager of the Duke of Cornwall's Theatre (formerly the Euterpe) accepted a three-act farce. It was poorly acted, yet for some reason it took the town. "*Larks in Aspic*, a Farcical Comedy by George Anthony," ran for a solid three hundred nights; and before it ceased my unsuspecting uncle had closed his earthly career, leaving me with seventy thousand pounds (the bulk of it invested in India Government stock), the house in the Cromwell Road, and, lastly, in sacred trust, his faithful body-servant, William John Trewlove.

Here let me pause to deplore man's weakness and the allurement of splendid possessions. I had been happy enough in my lodgings in Jermyn Street, and, thanks to *Larks in Aspic*, they were decently furnished. At

Digitized by Google

the prompting, surely, of some malignant spirit, I exchanged them for a house too large for me in a street too long for life, for my uncle's furniture (of the Great Exhibition period), and for the unnecessary and detested services of Trewlove.

This man enjoyed, by my uncle's will, an annuity of fifty pounds. He had the look, too, of one who denied himself small pleasures, not only on religious grounds, but because they cost money. Somehow, I never doubted that he owned a balance at the bank, or that, after a brief interval spent in demonstrating that our ways were uncongenial, he would retire on a competence and await translation to join my uncle in an equal sky—equal, that is, within the fence of the elect. But not a bit of it! I had been adjured in the will to look after him: and at first I supposed that he clung to me against inclination, from a conscientious resolve to give me every chance. By-and-by, however, I grew aware of a change in him; or, rather, of some internal disquiet, suppressed but volcanic, working towards a change. Once or twice he staggered me by answering some casual question in a tone which, to say the least of it, suggested an

Digitized by Google

ungainly attempt at facetiousness. A look at his sepulchral face would reassure me, but did not clear up the mystery. Something was amiss with Trewlove.

The horrid truth broke upon me one day as we discussed the conduct of one of my two housemaids. Trewlove, returning one evening (as I gathered) from a small *réunion* of his fellow-sectarians in the Earl's Court Road, had caught her in the act of exchanging railleries from an upper window with a trooper in the 2nd Life Guards, and had reported her.

"Most unbecoming," said I.

"Unwomanly," said Trewlove, with a sudden contortion of the face; "unwomanly, sir!—but ah, how like a woman!"

I stared at him for one wild moment, and turned abruptly to the window. The rascal had flung a quotation at me—out of *Larks in Aspic!* He knew, then! He had penetrated the disguise of "George Anthony," and, worse still, he meant to forgive it. His eye had conveyed a dreadful promise of complicity. Almost—I would have given worlds to know, and yet I dared not face it—almost it had been essaying a wink!

Digitized by Google

I dismissed him with instructions—not very coherent, I fear—to give the girl a talking-to, and sat down to think. How long had he known?—that was my first question, and in justice to him it had to be considered: since, had he known and kept the secret in my uncle's lifetime, beyond a doubt, and unpleasant as the thought might be, I was enormously his debtor. That stern warrior's attitude towards the playhouse had ever been uncompromising. Stalls, pit, and circles—the very names suggested Dantesque images and provided illustrations for many a discourse. Themselves verbose, these discourses indicated A Short Way with Stage-players, and it stood in no doubt that the authorship of *Larks in Aspic* had only to be disclosed to him to provide me with the shortest possible cut out of seventy thousand pounds.

I might, and did, mentally consign Trewlove to all manner of painful places, as, for instance, the bottom of the sea; but I could not will away this obligation. After cogitating for awhile I rang for him.

"Trewlove," said I, "you know, it seems, that I have written a play."

"Yessir! *Larks in Aspic*, sir."

Digitized by Google

I winced. "Since when have you known this?"

The dog, I am sure, took the bearings of this question at once. But he laid his head on one side, and while he pulled one whisker, as if ringing up the information, his eyes grew dull and seemed to be withdrawing into visions of a far-away past. "I have been many times to see it, Mr. George, and would be hard put to it to specify the first occasion. But it was a mattinay."

"That is not what I asked, Trewlove. I want to know when you first suspected or satisfied yourself that I was the author."

"Oh, at once, sir! The style, if I may say so, was unmistakable: *in*-nimitable, sir, if I may take the libbaty."

"Excuse me," I began; but he did not hear. He had passed for the moment beyond decorum, and his eyes began to roll in a manner expressive of inward rapture, but not pretty to watch.

"I had not listened to your talk, sir, in private life—I had not, as one might say, imbibed it—for nothink. The General, sir—your lamented uncle—had a flow: he would, if allowed, and meaning no disrespect, talk

Digitized by Google

the hind leg off a jackass; but I found him lacking in 'umour. Now you, Mr. George, 'ave 'umour. You 'ave not your uncle's flow, sir—the Lord forbid! But in give-and-take, as one might say, you are igstreamly droll. On many occasions, sir, when you were extra sparkling I do assure you it required pressure not to igsplode."

"I thank you, Trewlove," said I coldly. "But will you, please, waive these unsolicited testimonials and answer my question? Let me put it in another form. Was it in my uncle's lifetime that you first witnessed my play?"

Trewlove's eyes ceased to roll, and, meeting mine, withdrew themselves politely behind impenetrable mists. "The General, sir, was opposed to theatre-going *in toto*; anathemum was no word for what he thought of it. And if it had come to *Larks in Aspic*, with your permission I will only say 'Great Scot!'"

"I may take it then that you did not see the play and surprise my secret until after his death?"

Trewlove drew himself up with fine reserve and dignity. "There is such a thing, sir, I 'ope, as Libbaty of Conscience."

Digitized by Google

With that I let him go. The colloquy had not only done me no service, but had positively emboldened him—or so I seemed to perceive as the weeks went on—in his efforts to cast off his old slough and become a travesty of me, as he had been a travesty of my uncle. I am willing to believe that they caused him pain. A crust of habit so inveterate as his cannot be rent without throes, to the severity of which his facial contortions bore witness whenever he attempted a witticism. Warned by them, I would sometimes admonish him—

"Mirth without vulgarity, Trewlove!"

"Yessir," he would answer, and add with a sigh, "it 's the best sort, sir—*ad*mittedly."

But if painful to him, this metamorphosis was torture to my nerves. I should explain that, flushed with the success of *Larks in Aspic*, I had cheerfully engaged myself to provide the Duke of Cornwall's with a play to succeed it. At the moment of signing the contract my bosom's lord had sat lightly on its throne, for I felt my head to be humming with ideas. But affluence, or the air of the Cromwell Road, seemed uncongenial to the Muse.

Three months had slipped away. I had

Digitized by Google

not written a line. My ideas, which had seemed on the point of precipitation, surrendering to some centrifugal eddy, slipped one by one beyond grasp. I suppose every writer of experience knows these vacant terrifying intervals; but they were strange to me then, and I had not learnt the virtue of waiting. I grew flurried, and saw myself doomed to be the writer of one play.

In this infirmity the daily presence of Trewlove became intolerable. There arrived an evening when I found myself toying with the knives at dinner, and wondering where precisely lay the level of his fifth rib at the back of my chair.

I dropped the weapon and pushed forward my glass to be refilled. "Trewlove," said I, "you shall pack for me to-morrow, and send off the servants on board wages. I need a holiday. I—I trust this will not be inconvenient to you?"

"I thank you, sir; not in the least." He coughed, and I bent my head, some instinct forewarning me.

"I shall be away for three months at least," I put in quickly. (Five minutes before I had not dreamed of leaving home.)

Digitized by Google

But the stroke was not to be averted. For months it had been preparing.

"As for inconvenience, sir—if I may remind you—the course of Trewlove never did——"

"For three months at least," I repeated, rapping sharply on the table.

Next day I crossed the Channel and found myself at Ambleteuse.

Digitized by Google

II.

I CHOSE Ambleteuse because it was there that I had written the greater part of *Larks in Aspic*. I went again to my old quarters at Madame Peyron's. As before, I eschewed company, excursions, all forms of violent exercise. I bathed, ate, drank, slept, rambled along the sands, or lay on my back and stared at the sky, smoking and inviting my soul. In short, I reproduced all the old conditions. But in vain! At Ambleteuse, no less than in London, the Muse either retreated before my advances, or, when I sat still and waited, kept her distance, declining to be coaxed.

Matters were really growing serious. Three weeks had drifted by with not a line and scarcely an idea to show for them; and the morning's post had brought me a letter from Cozens, of the Duke of Cornwall's, begging for (at least) a scenario of the new piece. My play (he said) would easily last this season out; but he must reopen in the autumn with a new one, and—in short, weren't we beginning to run some risk?

Digitized by Google

I groaned, crushed the letter into my pocket, and by an effort of will put the tormenting question from me until after my morning bath. But now the time was come to face it. I began weakly by asking myself why the dickens I—with enough for my needs—had bound myself to write this thing within a given time, at the risk of turning out inferior work. For that matter, why should I write a comedy at all if I didn't want to? These were reasonable questions, and yet they missed the point. The point was that I had given my promise to Cozens, and that Cozens depended on it. Useless to ask now why I had given it! At the time I could have promised cheerfully to write him three plays within as many months.

So full my head was then, and so empty now! A grotesque and dreadful suspicion took me. While Trewlove tortured himself to my model, was I, by painful degrees, exchanging brains with him? I laughed; but I was unhinged. I had been smoking too many cigarettes during these three weeks, and the vampire thought continued to flit obscenely between me and the pure seascape. I saw myself the inheritor of Trewlove's cast-off personality, his inelegancies of movement,

Digitized by Google

his religious opinions, his bagginess at the knees, his mournful, pensile whiskers——

This would never do! I must concentrate my mind on the play. Let me see—— The title can wait. Two married couples have just been examined at Dunmow, and awarded the "historic" flitch for conjugal happiness. Call them A and Mrs. A, B and Mrs. B. On returning to the hotel with their trophies, it is discovered that B and Mrs. A are old flames, while each finds a mistaken reason to suspect that A and Mrs. B have also met years before, and at least dallied with courtship. Thus while their spouses alternately rage with suspicion and invent devices to conceal their own defaults, A and Mrs. B sit innocently nursing their illusions and their symbolical flitches. The situation holds plenty of comedy, and the main motive begins to explain itself. Now then for anagnorisis, comic peripeteia, division into acts, and the rest of the wallet!

I smoked another two cigarettes and flung away a third in despair. Useless! The plaguey thing refused to take shape. I sprang up and paced the sands, dogged by an invisible Cozens piping thin reproaches above the hum of the breakers.

Digitized by Google

Suddenly I came to a halt. Why *this* play? Why expend vain efforts on this particular complication when in a drawer at home lay two acts of a comedy ready written, and the third and final act sketched out? The burden of months broke its straps and fell from me as I pondered. *My Tenant* was the name of the thing, and I had thrust it aside only when the idea of *Larks in Aspic* occurred to me —not in any disgust. And really, now, what I remembered of it seemed to me astonishingly good!

I pulled out my watch, and as I did so there flashed on me—in that sudden freakish way which the best ideas affect—a new and brilliant idea for the plot of *My Tenant*. The whole of the third and concluding act spread itself instantaneously before me. I knew then and there why the play had been laid aside. It had waited for this, and it wanted only this. I held the thing now, compact and tight, within my five fingers: as tight and compact as the mechanism of the watch in my hand.

But why had I pulled out the watch? Because the manuscript of *My Tenant* lay in the drawer of my writing-table in the

Digitized by Google

Cromwell Road, and I was calculating how quickly a telegram would reach Trewlove with instructions to find and forward it. Then I bethought me that the lock was a patent one, and that I carried the key with me on my private key-chain. Why should I not cross from Calais by the next boat and recover my treasure? It would be the sooner in my possession. I might be reading it again that very night in my own home and testing my discovery. I might return with it on the morrow—that is, if I desired to return. After all, Ambleteuse had failed me. In London, I could shut myself up and work at white heat. In London, I should be near Cozens: a telegram would fetch him out to South Kensington within the hour, to listen and approve. (I had no doubt of his approval.) In London, I should renew relations with the real Trewlove—the familiar, the absurd. I will not swear that for the moment I thought of Trewlove at all: but he remained at the back of my mind, and at Calais I began the process of precipitating him (so to speak) by a telegram advertising him of my return, and requesting that my room might be prepared.

I had missed the midday boat, and reached

Digitized by Google

Dover by the later and slower one as the June night began to descend. From Victoria I drove straight to my club, and snatched a supper of cold meats in its half-lit dining-room. Twenty minutes later I was in my hansom again and swiftly bowling westward—I say "bowling" because it is the usual word, and I was in far too fierce a hurry to think of a better.

I had dropped back upon London in the fastest whirl of the season, and at the hour when all the world rolls homeward from the theatres. Two hansoms raced with mine, and red lights by the score dotted the noble slope of Piccadilly. To the left the street-lamps flung splashes of theatrical green on the sombre boughs of the Green Park. In one of the porticos to the right half a dozen guests lingered for a moment and laughed together before taking their leave. One of them stood on the topmost steps, lighting a cigarette: he carried his silk-lined Inverness over his arm—so sultry the night was—and the ladies wore but the slightest of wraps over their bright frocks and jewels. One of them as we passed stepped forward, and I saw her dismissing her brougham. A night for

Digitized by Google

walking, thought the party: and a fine night for sleeping out of doors, thought the road-watchman close by, watching them and meditatively smoking behind his barricade hung with danger-lanterns. Overhead rode the round moon.

It is the fashion to cry down London, and I have taken my part in the chorus; but always—be the absence never so short—I come back to her with the same lift of the heart. Why did I ever leave her? What had I gone a-seeking in Ambleteuse?—a place where a man leaves his room only to carry his writing-desk with him and plant it by the sea. London offered the only true recreation. In London a man might turn the key on himself and work for so long as it pleased him. But let him emerge, and—pf! —the jostle of the streets shook his head clear of the whole stuffy business. No; decidedly I would not return to Madame Peyron's. London for me, until my comedy should be written, down to the last word on the last page!

We were half way down the Cromwell Road when I took this resolution, and at once I was aware of a gathering of carriages drawn

Digitized by Google

up in line ahead and close beside the pavement. At intervals the carriages moved forward a few paces and the line closed up; but it stretched so far that I soon began to wonder which of my neighbours could be entertaining on a scale so magnificent.

"What number did you say, sir?" the cabman asked through his trap.

"Number 402," I called up.

"Blest if I can get alongside the pavement then," he grumbled. He was a surly man.

"Never mind that. Pull up opposite Number 402 and I'll slip between. I've only my bag to carry."

"Didn't know folks was so gay in these outlyin' parts," he commented sourly, and closed the trap, but presently opened it again. His horse had dropped to a walk. "Did you say four-nought-two?" he asked.

"Oh, confound it—yes!" I was growing impatient.

He pulled up and began to turn the horse's head.

"Hi! What are you doing?"

"Goin' back to the end of the line—back to take our bloomin' turn," he answered wearily. "Four-nought-two, you said, didn't you?"

Digitized by Google

"Yes, yes; are you deaf? What have I to do with this crowd?"

"I hain't deaf, but I got eyes. Four-nought-two 's where the horning 's up, that 's all."

"The horning? What 's that?"

"Oh, I 'm tired of egsplanations. A horning 's a horning, what they put up when they gives a party; leastways," he added reflectively, "*Hi* don't."

"But there 's no party at Number 402," I insisted. "The thing 's impossible."

"Very well, then; I 'm a liar, and that ends it." He wheeled again and began to walk his horse sullenly forward. "'Oo 's blind this time?" he demanded, coming to a standstill in front of the house.

An awning stretched down from the front door and across the pavement, where two policemen guarded the alighting guests from pressure by a small but highly curious crowd. Overhead, the first-floor windows had been flung wide; the rooms within were aflame with light; and, as I grasped the rail of the splashboard, and, straightening myself up, gazed over the cab-roof with a wild surmise into the driver's face, a powerful but invisible

Digitized by Google

string band struck up the "Country Girl" Lancers!

"'Oo 's a liar now?" He jerked his whip towards the number "402" staring down at me from the illuminated pane above the awning.

"But it 's my own house!" I gasped.

"Hoh?" said he. "Well, it *may* be. *I* don't conteraddict."

"Here, give me my bag!" I fumbled in my pocket for his fare.

"Cook giving a party? Well, you 're handy for the Wild West out here—good old Earl's Court!" He jerked his whip again towards the awning as a North American Indian in full war-paint passed up the steps and into the house, followed by the applause of the crowd.

I must have overpaid the man extravagantly, for his tone changed suddenly as he examined the coins in his hand. "Look here, guvnor, if you want any little 'elp, I was barman one time at the 'Elephant'——"

But I caught up my bag, swung off the step, and, squeezing between a horse's wet nose and the back of a brougham, gained the pavement, where a red-baize carpet divided the ranks of the crowd,

Digitized by Google

"Hullo!" One of the policemen put out a hand to detain me.

"It's all right," I assured him; "I belong to the house." It seemed a safer explanation than that the house belonged to me.

"Is it the ices?" he asked.

But I ran up the porchway, eager to get to grips with Trewlove.

On the threshold a young and extremely elegant footman confronted me.

"Where is Trewlove?" I demanded.

The footman was glorious in a tasselled coat and knee-breeches, both of bright blue. He wore his hair in powder, and eyed me with suspicion if not with absolute disfavour.

"Where is Trewlove?" I repeated, dwelling fiercely on each syllable.

The ass became lightly satirical. "Well we may wonder," said he; "search the wide world over! But reely and truly you 've come to the wrong 'ouse this time. Here, stand to one side!" he commanded, as a lady in the costume of La Pompadour, followed by an Old English Gentleman with an anachronistic Hebrew nose, swept past me into the hall. He bowed deferentially while he mastered their names, "Mr. and Mrs. Levi-Levy!"

Digitized by Google

he cried, and a second footman came forward to escort them up the stairs. To convince myself that this was my own house I stared hard at a bust of Havelock—my late uncle's chief, and for religious as well as military reasons his *beau idéal* of a British warrior.

The young footman resumed. "When you 've had a good look round and seen all you want to see——"

"I am Mr. Richardson," I interrupted; "and up to a few minutes ago I supposed myself to be the owner of this house. Here—if you wish to assure yourself—is my card."

His face fell instantly, fell so completely and woefully that I could not help feeling sorry for him. "I beg pardon, sir—most 'umbly, I do indeed. You will do me the justice, sir—I had no idea, as *per* description, sir, being led to expect a different kind of gentleman altogether.

"You had my telegram, then?"

"Telegram, sir?" He hesitated, searching his memory.

"Certainly—a telegram sent by me at one o'clock this afternoon, or thereabouts——"

Here, with an apology, he left me to attend to a new arrival—a Yellow Dwarf with a

Digitized by Google

decidedly music-hall manner, who nudged him in the stomach and fell upon his neck exclaiming, "My long-lost brother!"

"Cert'nly, sir. You will find the *company* upstairs, sir." The young man disengaged himself with admirable dignity and turned again to me. "A telegram did you say——"

"Addressed to 'Trewlove, 402, Cromwell Road.'"

"William!" He summoned another footman forward. "This gentleman is inquiring for a telegram sent here this afternoon, addressed 'Trewlove'"

"There was such a telegram," said William. "I heard Mr. Horrex a-discussing of it in the pantry. The mistress took the name for a telegraphic address, and sent it back to the office, saying there must be some mistake."

"But I sent it myself!"

"Indeed, sir?"

"It contained an order to get my room ready."

"This gentleman is Mr. Richardson," explained the younger footman.

"Indeed, sir?" William's face brightened. "In that case there's no 'arm done, for your room is ready, and I laid out your dress myself,

Digitized by Google

Mr. 'Erbert gave particular instructions before going out."

"Mr. Herbert?" I gazed around me blankly. Who in the name of wonder was Mr. Herbert?

"If you will allow me, sir," suggested William, taking my bag, while the other went back to his post.

"Thank you," said I, "but I know my own room, I hope."

He shook his head. "The mistress made some alterations at the last moment, and you're on the fourth floor over the street. Mr. 'Erbert's last words were that if you arrived before him I was to 'ope you didn't mind being so near the roof."

Well, of one thing at least I could be sure: I was in my own house. For the rest, I might be Rip van Winkle or the Sleeper Awakened. Who was this lady called "the mistress"? Who was Mr. Herbert? How came they here? And—deepest mystery of all—how came they to be expecting *me?* Some villainy of Trewlove's must be the clue of this tangle; and, holding to this clue, I resolved to follow whither fate might lead.

Digitized by Google

III.

WILLIAM lifted my bag and led the way. On the first landing, where the doors stood open and the music went merrily to the last figure of the Lancers, we had to pick our way through a fantastic crowd which eyed me with polite curiosity. Couples seated on the next flight drew aside to let us pass. But the second landing was empty, and I halted for a moment at the door of my own workroom, within which lay my precious manuscript.

"This room is unoccupied?"

"Indeed, no, sir. The mistress considers it the cheerfullest in the 'ouse."

"Our tastes agree then."

"She had her bed moved in there the very first night."

"Indeed." I swung round on him hastily. "By-the-by, what is your mistress's name?"

He drew back a pace and eyed me with some embarrassment. "You'll excuse me, sir, but that ain't quite a fair question as between you and me."

Digitized by Google

"No? I should have thought it innocent enough."

"Of course, it's a hopen secret, and you're only askin' it to try me. But so long as the mistress fancies a hincog——"

"Lead on," said I. "You are an exemplary young man, and I, too, am playing the game to the best of my lights."

"Yes, sir." He led me up to a room prepared for me—with candles lit, hot water ready, and bed neatly turned down. On the bed lay the full costume of a Punchinello: striped stockings, breeches with rosettes, tinselled coat with protuberant stomach and hump, cocked hat, and all proper accessories —even to a false nose.

"Am I expected to get into these things?" I asked.

"If I can be of any assistance, sir——"

"Thank you: no." I handed him the key of my bag, flung off coat and waistcoat, and sat down to unlace my boots. "Your mistress is in the drawing-room, I suppose, with her guests?"

"She is, sir."

"And Mr. Herbert?"

"Mr. 'Erbert was to have been 'ome by ten-

Digitized by Google

thirty. He is—as you know, sir—a little irregilar. But youth"—William arranged my brushes carefully—"youth must 'ave its fling. Oh, he's a caution!" A chuckle escaped him; he checked it and was instantly demure. Almost, indeed, he eyed me with a look of rebuke. "Anything more, sir?"

"Nothing more, thank you."

He withdrew. I thrust my feet into the dressing slippers he had set out for me, and, dropping into an armchair, began to take stock of the situation. "The one thing certain," I told myself, "is that Trewlove in my absence has let my house. Therefore Trewlove is certainly an impudent scoundrel, and any grand jury would bring in a true bill against him for a swindler. My tenants are a lady whose servants may not reveal her name, and a young man—her husband perhaps—described as 'a little irregilar.' They are giving a large fancy-dress ball below—which seems to prove that, at any rate, they don't fear publicity. And, further, although entire strangers to me, they are expecting my arrival and have prepared a room. Now, why?"

Here lay the real puzzle, and for some minutes I could make nothing of it. Then I

Digitized by Google

remembered my telegram. According to William it had been referred back to the post office. But William on his own admission had but retailed pantry gossip caught up from Mr. Horrex (presumably the butler). Had the telegram been sent back *unopened?* William's statement left this in doubt. Now supposing these people to be in league with Trewlove, they might have opened the telegram, and, finding to their consternation that I was already on the road and an exposure inevitable, have ordered my room to be prepared, trusting to throw themselves on my forgiveness, while Trewlove lay a-hiding or fled from vengeance across the high seas. Here was a possible explanation; but I will admit that it seemed, on second thoughts, an unlikely one. An irate landlord, returning unexpectedly and finding his house in possession of unauthorised tenants —catching them, moreover, in the act of turning it upside-down with a fancy-dress ball— would naturally begin to be nasty on the doorstep. The idea of placating him by a bedroom near the roof and the costume of a Punchinello was too bold altogether, and relied too much on his unproved fund of good-nature. Moreover, Mr. Herbert (whoever he

Digitized by Google

might be) would not have treated the situation so cavalierly. At the least (and however "irregilar"), Mr. Herbert would have been waiting to deprecate vengeance. A wild suspicion occurred to me that "Mr. Herbert" might be another name for Trewlove, and that Trewlove under that name was gaining a short start from justice. But no: William had alluded to Mr. Herbert as to a youth sowing his wild oats. Impossible to contemplate Trewlove under this guise! Where then did Trewlove come in? Was he, perchance, "Mr. Horrex," the butler?

I gave it up and began thoughtfully, and not without difficulty, to case myself in the disguise of Punchinello. I resolved to see this thing through. The costume had evidently not been made to my measure, and in the process of induing it I paused once or twice to speculate on the eccentricities of the figure to which it had been shaped or the abstract anatomical knowledge of the tailor who had shaped it. I declare that the hump seemed the one normal thing about it. But by this time my detective-hunger—not to call it a thirst for vengeance—was asserting itself above petty vanity. I squeezed myself into the

Digitized by Google

costume; and then, clapping on the false nose, stood arrayed—as queer a figure, surely, as ever was assumed by retributive Justice.

So, with a heart hardened by indignation and prepared for the severest measures, I descended to the drawing-room landing. Two doors opened upon it—that of the drawing-room itself, which faced over a terrace roofing the kitchens and across it to a garden in the rear of the house, and that of a room overlooking the street and scarcely less spacious. This had been the deceased General's bedroom, and in indolence rather than impiety I had left it unused with all its hideous furniture—including the camp-bed which his martial habits affected. And this was the apartment I entered, curious to learn how it had been converted into a reception-room for the throng which now filled it.

I recognised only the wall-paper. The furniture had been removed, the carpet taken up, the boards waxed to a high degree of slipperiness; and across the far end stretched a buffet-table presided over by a venerable person in black, with white hair, a high clear complexion, and a deportment which hit a nice mean between the military and the episcopal.

Digitized by Google

I had scarcely time to tell myself that this must be Mr. Horrex, before he looked up and caught sight of me. His features underwent a sudden and astonishing change; and almost dropping a bottle of champagne in his flurry, he came swiftly round the end of the buffet towards me.

I knew not how to interpret his expression: surprise was in it, and eagerness, and suppressed agitation, and an appeal for secrecy, and at the same time (if I mistook not) a deep relief.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he began, in a sort of confidential whisper, very quick and low, "but I was not aware you had arrived."

I gazed at him with stern inquiry.

"You are Mr. Richardson, are you not?" he asked. There could be no doubt of his agitation.

"I am; and I have been in this, my house, for some three-quarters of an hour."

"They never told me," he groaned. "And I left particular instructions—— But perhaps you have already seen the mistress?"

"I have not. May I ask you to take me to her—since I have not the pleasure of her acquaintance?"

Digitized by Google

"Cert'nly, sir. Oh, at once! She is in the drawing-room putting the best face on it, Twice she has sent in to know if you have arrived, and I sent word, 'No, not yet,' though it cut me to the 'eart."

"She is anxious to see me?"

"Desprit, sir."

"She thinks to avoid exposure, then?" said I darkly, keeping a set face.

"She 'opes, sir: she devoutly 'opes." He groaned and led the way. "It may, after all, be a lesson to Mr. 'Erbert," he muttered as we reached the landing.

"I fancy it's going to be a lesson to several of you."

"The things we've 'ad to keep dark, sir—the goings-on!"

"I can well believe it."

"I was in some doubts about you, sir—begging your pardon: but in spite of the dress, sir—which gives a larky appearance, if I may say it—and doubtless is so meant—you reassure me, sir: you do indeed. I feel the worst is over. We can put ourselves in your 'ands."

"You have certainly done that," said I. "As for the worst being over——"

We were within the drawing-room by this

Digitized by Google

time, and he plucked me by the sleeve in his excitement, yet deferentially. "Yonder is the mistress, sir—in the yellow h'Empire satin—talking with the gentleman in sky-blue rationals. Ah, she sees you!"

She did. And I read at once in her beautiful eyes that while talking with her partner she had been watching the door for me. She came towards me with an eager catch of the breath—one so very like a cry of relief that in the act of holding out her hand she had to turn to the nearest guests and explain.

"It 's Mr. Richardson—'George Anthony,' you know—who wrote *Larks in Aspic!* I had set my heart on his coming, and had almost given him up. Why are you so cruelly late?" she demanded, turning her eyes on mine.

Her hand was still held out to me. I had meant to hold myself up stiffly and decline it; but somehow I could not. She was a woman, after all, and her look told me—and me only—that she was in trouble. Also I knew her by face and by report. I had seen her acting in more than one exceedingly stupid musical comedy, and wondered why "Clara Joy" condescended to waste herself upon such

Digitized by Google

inanities. I recalled certain notes in her voice, certain moments when, in the midst of the service of folly, she had seemed to isolate herself and stand watching, aloof from the audience and her fellow-actors, almost pathetically alone. Report said, too, that she was good, and that she had domestic troubles, though it had not reached me what these troubles were. Certainly she appeared altogether too good for these third-rate guests—for third-rate they were to the most casual eye. And the trouble, which signalled to me now in her look, clearly and to my astonishment included no remorse for having walked into a stranger's house and turned it up-side down without so much as a by-your-leave. She claimed my goodwill confidently, without any appeal to be forgiven. I held my feelings under rein and took her hand.

As I released it she motioned me to give her my arm. "I must find you supper at once," she said quietly, in a tone that warned me not to decline. "Not—not in there; we will try the library downstairs."

Down to the library I led her accordingly, and somehow was aware—by that super-numerary sense which works at times in the

Digitized by Google

back of a man's head—of Horrex discreetly following us. At the library-door she turned to him. "When I ring," she said. He bowed and withdrew.

The room was empty and dark. She switched on the electric light and nodded to me to close the door.

"Take that off, please," she commanded.

"I beg your pardon? . . . Ah, to be sure!" I had forgotten my false nose.

"How did Herbert pick up with you?" she asked musingly. "His friends are not usually so—so——"

"Respectable?" I suggested.

"I think I meant to say 'presentable.' They are never respectable by any chance."

"Then, happily, it still remains to be proved that I am one of them."

"He seems, at any rate, to reckon you high amongst them, since he gave your name."

"Gave my name? To whom?"

"Oh, I don't know—to the magistrate—or the policeman—or whoever it is. I have never been in a police-cell myself," she added, with a small smile.

"Is Herbert, then, in a police-cell?"

Digitized by Google

She nodded. "At Vine Street. He wants to be bailed out."

"What amount?"

"Himself in ten pounds and a friend in another ten. He gave your name; and the policeman is waiting for the answer."

"I see," said I; "but excuse me if I fail to see why, being apparently so impatient to bail him out, you have waited for me. To be sure (for reasons which are dark to me) he appears to have given my name to the police; but we will put that riddle aside for the moment. Any respectable citizen would have served, with the money to back him. Why not have sent Horrex, for example?"

"But I thought the—the——"

"Surety?" I suggested.

"I thought he must be a householder. No," she cried, as I turned away with a slight shrug of the shoulder, "that was not the real reason! Herbert is—oh, why will you force me to say it?"

"I beg your pardon," said I. "He is at certain times not too tractable; Horrex, in particular, cannot be trusted to manage him; and—and in short you wish him released as soon as possible, but not brought home to

Digitized by Google

this house until your guests have taken leave?"

She nodded at me with swimming eyes. She was passing beautiful, more beautiful than I had thought.

"Yes, yes; you understand! And I thought that—as his friend—and with your influence over him——"

I pulled out my watch. "Has Horrex a hansom in waiting?"

"A four-wheeler," she corrected me. Our eyes met, and with a great pity I read in hers that she knew only too well the kind of cab suitable.

"Then let us have in the policeman. A four-wheeler will be better, as you suggest, since with your leave I am going to take Horrex with me. The fact is, I am a little in doubt as to my influence: for to tell you the plain truth, I have never to my knowledge set eyes on your husband."

"My husband?" She paused with her hand on the bell-pull, and gazed at me blankly. "My husband?" She began to laugh softly, uncannily, in a way that tore my heart. "Herbert is my brother."

"Oh!" said I, feeling pretty much of a fool.

Digitized by Google

"But what gave you—what do you mean ——"

"Lord knows," I interrupted her; "but if you will tell Horrex to get himself and the policeman into the cab, I will run upstairs, dress, and join them in five minutes."

Digitized by Google

IV.

IN five minutes I had donned my ordinary clothes again and, descending through the pack of guests to the front door, found a four-wheeler waiting, with Horrex inside and a policeman whom, as I guessed, he had been drugging with strong waters for an hour past in some secluded chamber of the house. The fellow was somnolent, and in sepulchral silence we journeyed to Vine Street. There I chose to be conducted to the cell alone, and Mr. Horrex, hearing my decision, said fervently, "May you be rewarded for your goodness to me and mine!"

I discovered afterwards that he had a growing family of six dependent on him, and think this must explain a gratefulness which puzzled me at the time.

"He's quieter this last half-hour," said the police sergeant, unlocking the cell and opening the door with extreme caution.

The light fell and my eyes rested on a sandy-haired youth with a receding chin, a black eye, a crumpled shirt-front smeared with blood,

Digitized by Google

and a dress-suit split and soiled with much rolling in the dust.

"Friend of yours, sir, to bail you out," announced the sergeant.

"I have no friends," answered the prisoner in hollow tones. "Who's this Johnny?"

"My name is Richardson," I began.

"From the Grampian Hills? Al' ri', old man; what can I do for you?"

"Well, if you 've no objection, I 've come to bail you out."

"Norra a bit of it. Go 'way: I want t' other Richardson, good old larks-in-aspic! Sergeant ——"

"Yessir."

"I protest—you hear?—protest in sacred name of law; case of mish—case of mistaken 'dentity. Not this Richardson—take him away! Don't blame you: common name. Richardson *I* want has whiskers down to here, tiddy-fol-ol; calls 'em 'Piccadilly weepers.' Can't mistake him. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

"Look here," said I, "just you listen to this; I 'm Richardson, and I 'm here to bail you out."

"Can't do it, old man; mean well, no doubt,

Digitized by Google

but can't do it. One man lead a horse to the water—twenty can't bail him out. Go 'way and don't fuss."

I glanced at the sergeant. "You'll let me deal with him as I like?" I asked.

He grinned. "Bless you, sir, we're used to it.. *I* ain't listening."

"Thank you." I turned to the prisoner. "Now, then, you drunken little hog, stand up and walk," said I, taking him by the ear and keeping my left ready.

I suppose that the drink suddenly left him weak, for he stood up at once.

"There's some ho—horrible mistake," he began to whimper. "But if the worst comes to the worst, you'll *adopt* me, won't you?"

Still holding him by the ear, I led him forth and flung him into the cab, in a corner of which the trembling Horrex had already huddled himself. He fell, indeed, across Horrex's knees, and at once screamed aloud.

"Softly, softly, Master 'Erbert," whispered the poor man soothingly. "It's only poor old Horrex, that you've known since a boy."

"Horrex?" Master Herbert straightened himself up. "Do I understand you to say, sir, that your name is Horrex? Then allow

Digitized by Google

me to tell you, Horrex, that you are no gentleman. You hear?" He spoke with anxious lucidity, leaning forward and tapping the butler on the knee. "No gentleman."

"No, sir," assented Horrex.

"That being the case, we'll say no more about it. I decline to argue with you. If you're waking, call me early—there's many a black, black eye, Horrex, but none so black as mine. Call me at eleven-fifteen, bringing with you this gentleman's blood in a bottle. Goo'-night, go to bye-bye. . . ."

By the fleeting light of a street-lamp I saw his head drop forward, and a minute later he was gently snoring.

It was agreed that on reaching home Master Herbert must be smuggled into the basement of No. 402 and put to rest on Horrex's own bed; also that, to avoid the line of carriages waiting in the Cromwell Road for the departing guests, the cab should take us round to the gardens at the back. I carried on my chain a key which would admit us to these and unlock the small gate between them and the kitchens. This plan of action so delighted Horrex that for a moment I feared he was going to clasp my hands,

Digitized by Google

"If it wasn't irreverent, sir, I could almost say you had dropped on me from heaven!"

"You may alter your opinion," said I grimly, "before I 've done dropping."

At the garden entrance we paid and dismissed the cab. I took Master Herbert's shoulders and Horrex his heels, and between us we carried his limp body across the turf—a procession so suggestive of dark and secret tragedy that I blessed our luck for protecting us from the casual intrusive policeman. Our entrance by the kitchen passage, however, was not so fortunate. Stealthily as we trod, our footsteps reached the ears in the servants' hall, and we were met by William and a small but compact body of female servants urging him to armed resistance. A kitchen-maid fainted away as soon as we were recognised, and the strain of terror relaxed.

I saw at once that Master Herbert's condition caused them no surprise. We carried him to the servants' hall and laid him in an armchair, to rest our arms, while the motherly cook lifted his unconscious head to lay a pillow beneath it.

As she did so, a bell jangled furiously on the wall above.

Digitized by Google

"Good Lord!" Horrex turned a scared face up at it. "The library!"

"What's the matter in the library?"

But he was gone: to reappear, a minute later, with a face whiter than ever.

"The mistress wants you at on'st, sir, if you'll follow me. William, run out and see if you can raise another cab—four-wheeler."

"What, at this time of night?" answered William. "Get along with you!"

"Do your best, lad." Mr. Horrex appealed gently but with pathetic dignity. "If there's miracles indoors there may be miracles outside. This way, sir!"

He led me to the library-door, knocked softly, opened it, and stood aside for me to enter.

Within stood his mistress, confronting another policeman!

Her hands rested on the back of a library-chair: and though she stood up bravely and held herself erect with her finger-tips pressed hard into the leather, I saw that she was swaying on the verge of hysterics, and I had the sense to speak sharply.

"What's the meaning of this?" I demanded.

Digitized by Google

"This one — comes from Marlborough Street!" she gasped.

I stepped back to the door, opened it, and, as I expected, discovered Horrex listening.

"A bottle of champagne and a glass at once," I commanded, and he sped. "And now, Miss Joy, if you please, the constable and I will do the talking. What's your business?"

"Prisoner wants bail," answered the policeman.

"Name?"

"George Anthony Richardson."

"Yes, yes—but I mean the prisoner's name."

"That's what I'm telling you. 'George Anthony Richardson, four-nought-two, Cromwell Road'—that's the name on the sheet, and I heard him give it myself."

"And I thought, of course, it must be you," put in Clara; "and I wondered what dreadful thing could have happened—until Horrex appeared and told me you were safe, and Herbert too——"

"I think," said I, going to the door again and taking the tray from Horrex, "that you were not to talk. Drink this, please."

Digitized by Google

She took the glass, but with a rebellious face. "Oh, if you take that tone with me ——"

"I do. And now," I turned to the constable, "what name did he give for his surety?"

"Herbert Jarmayne, same address."

"Herbert Jarmayne?" I glanced at Clara, who nodded back, pausing as she lifted her glass. "Ah! yes—yes, of course. How much?"

"Two tenners."

"Deep answering deep. Drunk and disorderly, I suppose?"

"Blind. He was breaking glasses at Toscano's and swearing he was Sir Charles Wyndham in *David Garrick:* but he settled down quiet at the station, and when I left he was talking religious and saying he pitied nine-tenths of the world, for they were going to get it hot."

"Trewlove!" I almost shouted, wheeling round upon Clara.

"I beg your pardon?"

"No, of course—you wouldn't understand. But all the same it's Trewlove," I cried, radiant. "Eh?"—this to Horrex, mumbling in the doorway—"the cab outside? Step

Digitized by Google

along, constable: I'll follow in a moment—to identify your prisoner, not to bail him out." Then as he touched his hat and marched out after Horrex, "By George, though! Trewlove!" I muttered, meeting Clara's eye and laughing.

"So you've said," she agreed doubtfully; "but it seems a funny sort of explanation."

"It's as simple as A B C," I assured her. "The man at Marlborough Street is the man who let you this house."

"I took it through an agent."

"I'm delighted to hear it. Then the man at Marlborough Street is the man for whom the agent let the house."

"Then you are not Mr. Richardson—not 'George Anthony'—and you didn't write *Larks in Aspic?*" said she, with a flattering shade of disappointment in her tone.

"Oh! yes, I did."

"Then I don't understand in the least—unless—unless——" She put out two deprecating hands. "You don't mean to tell me that this is your house, and we've been living in it without your knowledge! Oh! why didn't you tell me?"

"Come, I like that!" said I. "You'll

Digitized by Google

admit, on reflection, that you haven't given me much time."

But she stamped her foot. "I 'll go upstairs and pack at once," she declared.

"That will hardly meet the case, I 'm afraid. You forget that your brother is downstairs: and by his look, when I left him, he 'll take a deal of packing."

"Herbert?" She put a hand to her brow. "I was forgetting. Then you are not Herbert's friend after all?"

"I have made a beginning. But in fact, I made his acquaintance at Vine Street just now. Trewlove—that 's my scoundrel of a butler—has been making up to him under my name. They met at the house-agent's, probably. The rogue models himself upon me: but when it comes to letting my house—— By the way, have you paid him by cheque?"

"I paid the agent. I knew nothing of you until Herbert announced that he 'd made your acquaintance——"

"Pray go on," said I, watching her troubled eyes. "It would be interesting to hear how he described me."

"He used a very funny word. He said you were the rummiest thing in platers he 'd struck

Digitized by Google

for a long while. But, of course, he was talking of the other man."

"Of course," said I gravely: whereupon our eyes met, and we both laughed.

"Ah, but you are kind!" she cried. "And when I think how we have treated you—if only I *could* think——" Her hand went up again to her forehead.

"It will need some reparation," said I. "But we 'll discuss that when I come back."

"Was—was Herbert very bad?" She attempted to laugh, but tears suddenly brimmed her eyes.

"I scarcely noticed," said I; and, picking up my hat, went out hurriedly.

Digitized by Google

V.

TREWLOVE in his Marlborough Street cell was a disgusting object—offensive to the eye and to one's sense of the dignity of man. At sight of me he sprawled, and when the shock of it was over he continued to grovel until the sight bred a shame in me for being the cause of it. What made it ten times worse was his curious insensibility—even while he grovelled—to the moral aspect of his behaviour.

"You will lie here," said I, "until to-morrow morning, when you will probably be fined fifty shillings and costs, *plus* the cost of the broken glass at Toscano's. I take it for granted that the money will be paid?"

"I will send, sir, to my lodgings for my cheque-book."

"It's a trifling matter, no doubt, but since you will be charged under the name of William John Trewlove, it will be a mistake to put 'G. A. Richardson' on the cheque."

"It was an error of judgment, sir, my giving your name here."

Digitized by Google

"It was a worse one," I assured him, "to append it to the receipt for Miss Jarmayne's rent."

"You don't intend to prosecute, Mr. George?"

"Why not?"

"But you don't, sir; something tells me that you don't."

Well, in fact (as you may have guessed), I did not. I had no desire to drag Miss Jarmayne into further trouble; but I resented that the dog should so count on my clemency without knowing the reason of it.

"In justice to myself, sir, I 'ave to tell you that I shouldn't 'ave let the 'ouse to *hany*body. It was only that, she being connected with the stage, I saw a hopening. Mr. 'Erbert was, as you might say, a hafterthought: which, finding him so affable, I thought I might go one better. He cost me a pretty penny first and last. But when he offered to introjuice me—and me, at his invite, going back to be put up at No. 402 like any other gentleman—why, 'ow could I resist it?"

"If I forbear to have you arrested, Trewlove, it will be on condition that you efface yourself. May I suggest some foreign country,

Digitized by Google

where, in a colony of the Peculiar People—unacquainted with your past——"

"I 'm tired of them, sir. Your style of life don't suit me—I 've tried it, as you see, and I give it up—I 'm too late to learn; but I 'll say this for it, it cures you of wantin' to go back and be a Peculiar. Now, if you 've no objection, sir, I thought of takin' a little public down Putney way."

* * * * *

"You mean it?" asked Clara, a couple of hours later.

"I mean it," said I.

"And I am to live on here alone as your tenant?"

"As my tenant, and so long as it pleases you." I struck a match to light her bedroom candle, and with that we both laughed, for the June dawn was pouring down on us through the stairway skylight.

"Shall I see you to-morrow, to say good-bye?"

"I expect not. We shall catch the first boat."

"The question is, will you get Herbert awake in time to explain matters?"

"I 'll undertake that. Horrex has already

Digitized by Google

packed for him. Oh, you needn't fear: he'll be right enough at Ambleteuse, under my eye."

"It's good of you," she said slowly; "but why are you doing it?"

"Can't say," I answered lightly.

"Well, good-bye, and God bless you!" She put out her hand. "There's nothing I can say or do to——"

"Oh, yes, by the way, there is," I interrupted, tugging a key off my chain. "You see this? It unlocks the drawers of a writing-table in your room. In the top left-hand drawer you will find a bundle of papers."

She passed up the stair before me and into the room. "Is this what you want?" she asked, reappearing after a minute with my manuscript in her hand. "What is it? A new comedy?"

"The makings of one," said I. "It was to fetch it that I came across from Ambleteuse."

"And dropped into another."

"Upon my word," said I, "you are right, and to-night's is a better one—up to a point."

"What are you going to call it?"

Digitized by Google

"*My Tenant.*"

For a moment she seemed to be puzzled: "But I mean the other," said she, nodding towards the manuscript in my hand.

"Indeed, that is its name," said I, and showed her the title on the first page. "And I've a really splendid idea for the third act," I added, as we shook hands.

I mounted the stairs to my room, tossed the manuscript into a chair, and began to wind up my watch.

"But this other wants a third act too!" I told myself suddenly.

* * * * *

You will observe that once or twice in the course of this narrative my pen has slipped and inadvertently called Miss Jarmayne "Clara."

Digitized by Google

The Rider in the Dawn

A passage from the Memoirs of Manuel (or Manus) McNeill, agent in the Secret Service of Great Britain during the campaigns of the Peninsula (1808–1813). A Spanish subject by birth, and a Spaniard in all his up-bringing, he traces in the first chapter of his Memoirs his descent from an old Highland family through one Manus McNeill, a Jacobite agent in the Court of Madrid at the time of the War of Succession, who married and settled at Aranjuez. The second chapter he devotes to his youthful adventures in the contraband trade on the Biscayan Coast and the French frontier, his capture and imprisonment at Bilbao under a two years' sentence, which was remitted on the discovery of his familiar and inherited conversance with the English tongue, and his imprisonment exchanged for a secret mission to Corsica (1794). The following extract tells of this, his first essay in the calling in which he afterwards rendered signal service to the Allies under Lord Wellington.—Q.

IF I take small pleasure in remembering this youthful expedition it is not because I failed of success. It was a fool's errand from start to finish; and the Minister, Don Manuel Godoy, never meant or expected it to succeed, but furthered it only to keep his

Digitized by Google

master in humour. You must know that just at this time, May, 1794, the English troops and Paoli's native patriots were between them dislodging the French from the last few towns to which they yet clung on the Corsican coast. Paoli held all the interior: the British fleet commanded the sea and from it hammered the garrisons; and, in short, the French game was up. But now came the question, What would happen when they evacuated the island? Some believed that Paoli would continue in command of his little republic, others that the crown would be offered to King George of England, or that it might go a-begging as the patriots were left to discover their weakness. I understand that, on the chance of this, two or three claimants had begun to look up their titles; and at this juncture our own Most Catholic King bethought him that once upon a time the island had actually been granted to Aragon by a certain Pope Boniface —with what right nobody could tell; but a very little right might suffice to admit Spain's hand into the lucky bag. In brief, my business was to reach the island, find Paoli (already by shabby treatment incensed

Digitized by Google

against the English, as Godoy assured me), and sound him on my master's chances. Among the islanders I could pass myself off as a British agent, and some likely falsehood would have to serve me if by ill-luck I fell foul of the British soldiery. The King, who—saving his majesty—had turned the least bit childish in his old age, actually clapped his hands once or twice while his Minister gave me my instructions, which he did with a face as wooden as a grenadier's. I would give something, even at this distance of time, to know what Godoy's real thoughts were. Likely enough he and the Queen had invented this toy to amuse the husband they were both deceiving. Or Godoy may have wanted my information for his own purpose, to sell it to the French, with whom—though our armies were fighting them—he had begun to treat in private for the peace and the alliance which soon followed, and still move good Spaniards to spit at the mention of his name. But, whatever the farce was, he played it solemnly, and I took his instructions respectfully, as became me.

No: my mission was never meant to succeed: and if in my later professional pride

Digitized by Google

I now think shame of it—if to this day I wince at the remembrance of Corsica—the shame comes simply from this, that I began my career as a scout by losing my way like any schoolboy. But, after all, even genius must make a beginning; and I was fated to make mine in the Corsican *macchia*.

Do you know it? If not—that is to say, if you have never visited Corsica—I despair of giving you any conception of it. But if chance has ever carried you near its coast, you will have wondered—as I did when an innocent-looking felucca from Barcelona brought me off the Gulf of Porto—at an extraordinary verdure spreading up the mountains and cut short only by the snows on their summits. You ask what this verdure may be, of which you have never seen the like. It is the *macchia*.

I declare that the scent of it—or rather, its thousand scents—came wafted down on the night air and met me on the shore as I landed at moonrise below the ruined tower, planted by the Genoese of old, at the mouth of the vale which winds up from Porto to the mountains. We had pushed in under cover of the darkness, for fear of cruisers; and as I

Digitized by Google

took leave of my comrades (who were mostly Neapolitan fishermen), their skipper, a Corsican from Bastia, gave me my route. A good road would lead me up the valley to the village of Otta, where a mule might be hired to carry me on past Evvisa, through the great forest of Aïtone, and so across the pass over Monte Artica, whence below me I should see the plain of the Niolo stretching towards Corte and my goal: for at Corte, his capital, I was sure either to find Paoli or to get news of him, and if he had gone northward to rest himself (as his custom was) at his favourite Convent of Morosaglia, why the best road in Corsica would take me after him.

In the wash of the waves under the old tower I bade the skipper farewell, sprang ashore, and made my way up the valley by the light of the rising moon. Of the wonders of the island, which had shone with such promise of wonders against yesterday's sunset, it showed me little—only a white road climbing beside a deepening gorge with dark masses of foliage on either hand, and, above these, grey points and needles of granite glimmering against the night. But at every stride I drank in the odours of the *macchia*, my very skin seeming to absorb them,

Digitized by Google

as my clothes undoubtedly did before my journey's end; for years later I had only to open the coffer in which they reposed, and all Corsica saluted my nostrils.

Day broke as I climbed; and soon this marvellous brushwood was holding me at gaze for minutes at a time, my eyes feasting upon it as the sun began to open its flowers and subdue the scents of night with others yet more aromatic. In Spain we know *montebaxos*, or coppice shrubs (as you might call them), and we know *tomillares*, or undergrowth; but in Corsica nature heaps these together with both hands, and the Corsican, in despair of separating them, calls them all *macchia*. Cistus, myrtle and cactus; cytisus, lentisk, arbutus; daphne, heath, broom, juniper and ilex—these few I recognised, but there was no end to their varieties and none to their tangle of colours. The slopes flamed with heather bells red as blood, or were snowed white with myrtle blossom: wild roses trailed everywhere, and blue vetches: on the rock ledges the cistus kept its late flowers, white, yellow, or crimson: while from shrub to shrub away to the rock pinnacles high over my left shoulder honeysuckles and clematis looped themselves in

Digitized by Google

festoons as thick as a man's waist, or flung themselves over the chasm on my right, smothering the ilex saplings which clung to its sides, and hiding the water which roared three hundred feet below. I think that my month in prison must have sharpened my appetite for wild and natural beauty, for I skipped as I went, and whistled in sheer lightness of heart. "O Corsicans!" I exclaimed, "O favoured race of mortals, who spend your pastoral days in scenes so romantic, far from the noise of cities, the restless ambition of courts!"

At the first village of Otta, where the pass narrows to a really stupendous gorge and winds its way up between pyramidal crags soaring out of a sea of green chestnut groves, one of this favoured race (by name Giusé) attempted to sell me a mule at something like twice its value. I hired the beast instead, and also the services of its master to guide me through the two great forests which lay between me and the plain of the Niolo, one on either side of the ridge ahead. He carried a gun, and wore an air of extreme ferocity which daunted me until I perceived that all the rest of the villagemen were similarly favoured. Of his politeness

Digitized by Google

after striking the bargain I had no cause to complain. He accepted—and apparently with the simplest credulity—my account of myself, that I was an Englishman bound in the service of the Government to inspect and report on the forests of the interior, on the timber of which King George was prepared to lend money in support of the patriot troops. He himself had served as a stripling in Paoli's militia across the mountains on the great and terrible day of Ponte Nuovo, and by fits and starts, whenever the road allowed our two mules to travel abreast in safety, he told me the story of it, in a dialect of which I understood but one word in three, so different were its harsh aspirates and gutturals from any sounds in the Italian familiar to me.

The mules stepped out well, and in the shade of the ravine we pushed on steadily through the heat of the day. We had left the *macchia* far below us, and the road wound between and around sheer scarps of grey granite on the edge of precipices echoing the trickle of waters far below. We rode now in single file, and so continued until Evvisa was reached, and the upper hills began to open their folds. From Evvisa a rough track, yet

Digitized by Google

scored with winter ruts, led us around the southern side of one of these mountain basins, and so to the skirts of the forest of Aïtone, into the glooms of which we plunged, my guide promising to bring me out long before nightfall upon the ridge of the pass, where he would either encamp with me, or (if I preferred it) would leave me to encamp alone and find his way back to Evvisa.

So, with the sun at our backs and now almost half-way below its meridian, we threaded our way up between the enormous pine-trunks, in a gloom full of pillars which set me in mind of Cordova Cathedral. From their dark roof hung myriads of cocoons white as satin and shone in every glint of sunlight. And, whether over the carpet of pine-needles or the deeper carpet of husks where the pines gave place to beech groves, our going was always easy and even luxurious. I began to think that the difficulties of my journey were over; and as we gained the *bocca* at the top of the pass and, emerging from the last outskirt of pines, looked down on the weald beyond, I felt sure of it.

The plain lay at my feet like a huge saucer filled with shadow and rimmed with snowy

Digitized by Google

mountains on which the sunlight yet lingered. A good road plunged down into the gloom of Valdoniello—a forest at first glance very like that through which we had been riding, but smaller in size. Its dark green tops climbed almost to our feet, and over them Giusé pointed to the town of Niolo midway across the plain, traced with his finger the course of the Golo, and pointed to the right of it where a pass would lead me through the hill-chain to Corte.

I hesitated no longer: but thanked him, paid him his price and a trifle over, and, leaving him on the ridge, struck boldly downhill on foot towards the forest.

As with Aïtone so with Valdoniello. The road shunned its depths and, leading me down through the magnificent fringe of it, brought me out upon an open slope, if that can be called open which is densely covered to the height of a man's knees at times, and again to the height of his breast, with my old friend the *macchia*.

It was now twilight and I felt myself weary. Choosing an aromatic bed by the roadside where no prickly cactus thrust its way through the heather, I opened my wallet; pulled forth

Digitized by Google

a sausage, a crust, and a skin of wine; supped; and stretched myself to sleep through the short summer night.

* * * * *

"The howly Mother presarve us! Whist now, Daniel Cullinan, did ye'ver hear the like of it?"

I am glad to remember now that, even as the voice fell on my ear and awoke me, I had presence enough of mind to roll quickly off my bed of heath away from the road and towards the shelter of a laurestinus bush a few paces from my elbow. But between me and the shrub lay a fern-masked hollow between two boulders, into which I fell with a shock, and so lay staring up at the heavens.

The wasted moon hung directly overhead in a sky already paling with dawn. And while I stared up at her, taking stock of my senses and wondering if here—here in Corsica—I had really heard that inappropriate sound, soon across the hillside on my left echoed an even stranger one—yet one I recognised at once as having mingled with my dreams; a woman's voice pitched at first in a long monotonous wail and then undulating in semi-tones above and below the keynote—a voice

Digitized by Google

which seemed to call from miles away—a sound as dismal as ever fell on a man's ears.

"Arrah, let me go, Corp'ril! let me go, I tell yez! 'Tis the *banshee*—who knows it better than I?—that heard the very spit of it the day my brother Mick was drowned in Waterford harbour, and me at Ballyroan that time in Queen's County, and a long twenty-five miles away as ever the crow flies!"

"Ah, hold your whist, my son! Mebbee 'tis but some bird of the country—bad end to it!—or belike the man we're after, that has spied us, and is putting a game on us."

"Bird!" exclaimed the man he had called Daniel Cullinan, as again the wail rang down from the hills. "Catch the bird can talk like yondhar, and I give ye lave to eat him and me off the same dish. And if 'tis a man, and he's anywhere but on the road, here's a rare bottle of hay we'll search through for him. Rest aisy now, Corp'ril, and give it up. That man with the mules, we'll say, was a liar; and turn back before the worse befalls us!"

Through my ferny screen I saw them—two redcoats in British uniform disputing on the road not ten paces from my shelter. They

Digitized by Google

moved on some fifty yards, still disputing, the first sunrays glinting on the barrels of the rifles they shouldered: and almost as soon as their backs were turned I broke cover and crept away into the *macchia*.

Now the *macchia*, as I soon discovered, is prettier to look at than to climb through. I was a fool not to content myself with keeping at a tolerably safe distance from the road. As it was, with fear at my heels and a plenty of inexperience to guide me, I crawled through thickets and blundered over sharply pointed rocks; found myself on the verge of falls from twenty to thirty feet in depth; twisted my ankles, pushed my head into cactus, tangled myself in creepers; found and followed goat-tracks which led into other goat-tracks and ended nowhere; tore my hands with briers and my shoes on jagged granite; tumbled into beds of fern, sweated, plucked at arresting thorns, and at the end of twenty minutes discovered what every Corsican knows from infancy—that to lose one's way in the *macchia* is the simplest thing in life.

I had lost mine pretty thoroughly when, happening on what seemed at least a promising track, I cast my eyes up and saw, on a

Digitized by Google

ridge some two or three hundred yards ahead and sharply outlined against the blue morning sky, a horse and rider descending the slope towards me.

The horse I presently discerned to be a light roan of the island breed: and my first thought was that he seemed overweighted by his rider, who sat erect—astonishingly erect—with his head cased in a pointed hood and his body in a long dark cloak which fell from his shoulders to his knees. Although he rode with saddle and bridle, he apparently used neither stirrups nor reins, and it was a wonder to see how the man kept his seat as he did with his legs sticking out rigid as two vine-props and his arms held stiffly against his sides. I wasted no time, however, in marvelling, but ran forward as he approached and stretched out my hand to his rein, panting out, "O, friend, be good enough to guide me out of this tangle!—for I am a stranger and indeed utterly lost."

And with that all speech froze suddenly within me: and with good excuse—for I was looking up into the face of a corpse!

His eyes, shaded by the hood he wore, were glazed and wide, his features—the features of

Digitized by Google

an old man—livid in death. As I blenched before them, I saw that a stout pole held his body upright, a pole lashed firmly at the tail of his crupper, and terminating in two forking branches like an inverted V, against which his legs had been bound with leathern thongs.

And again as I blenched from the horrible face my eyes fell on the horse, and I saw that the poor little beast was no less than distraught with fright. What I had taken for grey streaks in his roan coat were in fact lathery flakes of sweat, and he nuzzled towards me as a horse will rarely nuzzle towards a stranger and only in extremest terror. A glance told me that he had been galloping wildly and bucking to free himself of his burden, but was now worn out and thoroughly cowed. His knees quivered as I soothed and patted him; and when I pulled out a knife to cut the corpse free from its lashings, he seemed to understand at once, and rubbed his nose gratefully against my waistcoat.

A moment later the knife almost dropped from my hand at the sound of a brisk hurrah from above, and looking up I saw the stalwart form of the Irish corporal wriggling along the branch of a cork-oak which overhung the slope.

Digitized by Google

He carried his rifle, and, anchoring himself in a fork of the boughs, stared down triumphantly.

"Arrah now," he hailed, "which of you's the man that came ashore at Porto and passed through Evvisa overnight? Spake up quick now, and surrender, for I have ye covered!"

He lifted his rifle. I cast my eye over the space of *macchia* between us, and decided that I had only his bullet to fear.

"*A poco, a poco,*" I called back. "Be in no hurry—*piano*, my friend: this gentleman has met with an accident to his stirrup!"

"The divvle take your impudence! Step forward this moment and surrender, or it's meat I 'll be making of the pair of you!"

And he meant it. I slipped behind the corpse, and hacked at its lashings as his rifle roared out; and for aught I know the corpse received the bullet. With a heave I toppled it and its ghastly frame together headlong into the fern, sprang to the saddle in its place, pointed to it, and with a shout of "Assassino! Assassino!" shook rein and galloped down the path.

A few strides removed me out of further danger from the corporal, perched as he was in an attitude extremely inconvenient

Digitized by Google

for reloading. Of his comrade I saw no signs, but judged him to be foundered somewhere in the *macchia*. The little roan had regained his wind. He took me down the precipitous track without a blunder, picked his way across the dry bed of a mountain torrent, and on the farther side struck off at right angles into a path which mounted through the *macchia* towards a wedge-shaped cleft in the foothills to the north. Now and again this path returned to the very lip of the torrent, across which I looked upon cliffs descending sheer for many scores of feet from the heathery slope to the boulders below. At the pace we held it was a sight to make me shiver. But the good little horse knew his road, and I let him take it. Up and up we mounted, his pace dropping at length to a slow canter, and so at an angle of the gorge came suddenly into full view of a grassy plateau with a house perched upon it—a house so high and narrow that at first glance I took it for a tower, with the more excuse because at first glance I could discern no windows.

As we approached it, however, I saw it to be a dwelling-house, and that it had windows,

Digitized by Google

though these were shuttered, and the shutters painted a light stone colour; and I had scarcely made this discovery when one of them jetted out a sudden puff of smoke and a bullet sang over my head.

The roan, which had fallen to a walk—so steep was the pitch of ground immediately beneath the house—halted at once as if puzzled; and you may guess if his dismay exceeded mine. But I reasoned from his behaviour on the road that this must be his home, and the folks behind the window shutters must recognise him. So standing high in my stirrups I waved a hand and pointed at him, at the same time shouting "Amico! Amico!"

There was no answer. The windows still stared down upon us blankly, but to my relief the shot was not repeated. "Amico! Amico!" I shouted again, and, alighting, led the horse towards the door.

It was opened cautiously and held a little ajar—just wide enough to give me a glimpse of a black-bearded face.

"Who are you?" a voice demanded in harsh Corsican.

"A friend," I answered, "and unarmed:

Digitized by Google

and see, I have brought you back your horse!"

The man called to someone within the house: then addressed me again. "Yes, it is indeed Nello. But how come you by him?"

"That is a long story," said I. "Be so good as either to step out or to open and admit me to your hospitality, that we may talk in comfort."

"To the house, O stranger, I have not the slightest intention of admitting you, seeing that the windows are stuffed with mattresses, and there is no light within—no, not so much as would show your face. And even less intention have I of stepping outside, since, without calling you a liar, I greatly suspect you are here to lead me into ambush."

"Oho!" said I, as a light broke on me. "Is this *vendetta?*"

"It is *vendetta*, and has been *vendetta* any day since the Saturday before last, when old Stephanu Ceccaldi swindled me out of that very horse from which you have alighted: and it fills me with wonder to see him here."

"My tale will not lessen your wonder," said I, "when you learn how I came by him. But as touching this Stephanu Ceccaldi?"

Digitized by Google

"As we hear, they were to have buried him last night at moonrise: for a week had not passed before my knife found him—the knife of me, Marcantonio Dezio. All night the *voceri* of the Ceccalde's women-folk have been sounding across the hills."

"Agreeable sir, I have later news of him. The Ceccalde (let us doubt not) did their best. They mounted him upon Nello here, the innocent cause of their affliction. They waked him with dirges which—now you come to mention them—were melancholy enough to drive a cat to suicide. They tied him upright, and rode him forth to the burial. But it would seem that Nello, here, is a true son of your clan: he cannot bear a Ceccaldi on top of him. For I met him scouring the hills with the corpse on his back, having given leg-bail to all his escort."

The Corsican has a heart, if you only know where to find it. Forgetting his dread of an ambush, or disregarding it in the violence of his emotion, Marcantonio flung wide the door, stepped forth, and casting both arms about the horse's neck and mane, caressed him passionately and even with tears.

Digitized by Google

"O Nello! O brave spirit! O true son of the Dezii!"

He called forth his family, and they came trooping through the doorway—an old man, two old women, a middle-aged matron whom I took for Marcantonio's wife, three stalwart girls, a stunted lad of about fourteen and four smaller and very dirty children. Their movements were dignified—even an infant Corsican rarely forgets his gravity—but they surrounded Nello one and all, and embraced him, and fed him on lumps of sugar. (Sugar, I may say, is a luxury in Corsica, and scarce at that.) They wept upon his mane and called him their little hero. They shook their fists towards that quarter, across the valley, in which I supposed the Ceccalde to reside. They chanted a song over the little beast while he munched his sugar with an air of conscious worth. And in short I imagined myself to be wholly forgotten in their delight at recovering him, until Marcantonio swung round suddenly and asked me to name a price for him.

"Eh?" said I. "What—for Nello? Surely, after what has happened, you can hardly bring yourself to part with him?"

"Hardly, indeed. O stranger, it will tear

Digitized by Google

my heart! But where am I to bestow him? The Ceccalde will be here presently; beyond doubt they are already climbing the pass. And for you also it will be awkward if they catch you here."

I had not thought of this danger. "The valley below will be barred then?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly."

"I might perhaps stay and lend you some help."

"This is the Dezii's private quarrel," he assured me with dignity. "But never fear for us, O stranger. We will give them as good as they bring."

"I am bound for Corte," said I.

"By following the track up to the *bocca* you will come in sight of the high-road. But you will never reach it without Nello's help, seeing that my private affairs hinder me from accompanying you. Now concerning this horse, he is one in a thousand: you might indeed say that he is worth his weight in gold."

"At all events," said I smiling, "he is a ticklish horse to pay too little for."

"A price is a price," answered Marcantonio gravely. "Old Stephanu Ceccaldi, catching

Digitized by Google

me drunk, thought to pay but half of it, but the residue I took when I was sober. Now, between gentlefolks, what dispute could there be over eighty livres? Eighty livres!—why it is scarce the price of a good mare!"

Well, bating the question of his right to sell the horse, eighty livres was assuredly cheap: and after a moment's calculation I resolved to close with him and accept the risk rather than by higgling over a point of honesty, which after all concerned his conscience rather than mine, to incur the more unpleasant one of a Ceccaldi bullet. I searched in my wallet and paid the money, while the Dezii with many sobs, mixed a half-pint of wine in a mash and offered this last tribute to the vindicator of their family honour.

So when Nello had fed and I had drunk a cup to their very long life, I mounted and jogged away up the pass. Once or twice I reined up on the ascent for a look back at the plateau. And always the Dezii stood there, straining their eyes after Nello and waving farewells.

On the far side of the ridge my ears were saluted by sounds of irregular musketry in the vale behind; and I knew that the second

Digitized by Google

stage in the Dezio-Ceccaldi *vendetta* had opened with vigour.

* * * * *

Three days later I had audience with the great Paoli in his rooms in the Convent of Marosaglia. He listened to my message with patience and to the narrative of my adventures with unfeigned interest. At the end he said—

"I think you had best quit Corsica with the least possible delay. And, if I may advise you further, you will follow the road northwards to Bastia, avoiding all short cuts. In any case, avoid the Niolo. I happen to know something of the Ceccalde, and their temper; and, believe me, I am counselling you for the best."

Digitized by Google

My Lady's Coach

From the Military Memoir of Capt. J. de Courcy, late of the North Wilts Regiment

THERE were four of us on top of the coach that night—the driver, the guard, the corporal and I—all well muffled up and swathed about the throat against the north-west wind; and we carried but one inside passenger, though he snored enough for six. You could hear him above the chink of the swingle-bars and the drumming of our horses' hoofs on the miry road. What this inside fare was like I had no means of telling; for when the corporal and I overtook the coach at Torpoint Ferry he was already seated, and being served through the door with hot kidney pasty and hot brandy-and-water. He had travelled down from London—so I learned

Digitized by Google

from the coachman by whose side I sat; and as soon as he ceased cursing the roads, the inns, the waiters, the weather and the country generally, his snores began to shake the vehicle under us as with the throes of Etna in labour.

The corporal squatted behind me with his feet on the treasure-chest and his loaded musket across his thighs, and the guard yet farther back on the roof nursing a blunderbuss and chanting to himself the dolefullest tune. For me I sat drumming my heels, with chin sunk deep within the collar of my greatcoat, one hand in its left hip-pocket and the other thrust through the breast-opening, where my fingers touched the butts of a brace of travelling pistols.

I was senior ensign of my regiment (the North Wilts), and my business was to overtake a couple of waggons that had started some seven or eight hours ahead of us with a consignment of pay-money to be delivered at Falmouth, where two of His Majesty's cruisers lay on the point of sailing for the West Indies. The chest over which I mounted guard had arrived late from London: it was labelled "supplementary," and my responsibilities

Digitized by Google

would end as soon as I transferred it to the lieutenant in charge of the waggons, which never moved above a walking-pace, and always, when conveying treasure, under escort of eight or ten soldiers or marines. "Russell's Waggons" they were called, and there was no record of their having being attacked.

The country, to which I was a stranger, appeared wild enough, with hedgeless downs rolling up black and unshapely against the night. But the coachman, who guessed what we carried, assured me that he had always found the road perfectly safe. I remember asking him how long he had been driving upon it: to which he gave no more direct answer than that he had been born in these parts and knew them better than his Bible. "And the same you may say of Jim," he added, with a jerk of his whip back towards the guard.

"He has a cheerful taste in tunes," I remarked.

The fellow chuckled. "That's his favourite. 'My Lady's Coach' he calls it, and—come to think of it—I never heard him sing any other."

"It doesn't sound like Tantivey." I strained

Digitized by Google

my ears for the words of the guard's song, and heard—

> "The wheels go round without a sound
> Or tramp or [inaudible] of whip—"

The words next following were either drowned by the wind or muffled and smothered in the man's neck-cloths; but by-and-by I caught another line or two—

> "Ho! ho! my lady saith,
> Step in and ride with me:
> She takes the baby, white as death,
> And jigs him on her knee.
> The wheels go round without a sound—"

This seemed to be the refrain.

> "The wheels go round without a sound
> Or [inaudible again] horse's tread,
> My lady's breath is foul as death,
> Her driver has no head—"

"Huh!" grunted I, sinking my shoulders deeper in my overcoat. "A nice sort of vehicle to meet, say on a night like this, at the next turn of the road!"

The man peered at me suddenly, and leaned forward to shorten his reins, for we were on the edge of a steepish dip downhill. The lamp-light shone on his huge forearm (as thick as

Digitized by Google

an ordinary man's thigh) and on his clumsy, muffled hands.

"Well, and so we might," he answered, picking up his whip again and indicating the dark moorland on our left. "That's if half the tales be true."

"Haunted?" I asked, scanning the darkness.

"Opposition coach—hearse and pair, driven by the Old Gentleman hisself. For my part, I don't believe a word of it. Leastways, I've driven along here often enough, and in most weathers, and I ha'n't met it yet."

"You're taking this bit pretty confidently anyhow," was my comment, as he shortened rein again; for the hill proved to be a precipitous one, and the horses, held back against the weight of the coach, went down the slope with much sprawling of hind-quarters and kicking up of loose stones. "Don't you put on the skid for this, as a rule?"

"Well, now, as you say, it might be wiser. This half-thaw makes the roads cruel greasy." With a tremendous wrench he dragged the team to a standstill. "Jim, my lad, hop down and give her the shoe."

I heard Jim clambering down, then the loud

Digitized by Google

rattle of the chain as he unhitched the shoe, not interrupting his song, however—

> "Ho! ho! my lady saith,
> Step in and ride with me:
> She takes the bride as white as death——"

"Hold up, there!" commanded a voice out of the darkness on my left.

"Hullo!" I whipped out one of my pistols and faced the sound, at the same instant shouting to the driver: "Quick, man! duck your head and give 'em the whip! Curse you for a coward—don't sit there hesitating!—the whip, I say, and put 'em at it!"

But the fellow would not budge. I turned, leaned past him, plucked the whip from its socket, and lashed out at the leaders. They plunged forward as a bullet sang over my head; but before they could break into a gallop the driver had wrenched them back again on their haunches. The coach gave a lurch or two and once more came to a standstill.

"Look here," said a voice almost at my feet, "you take it quiet, or you'll be hurt!" and a pair of hands reached up and gripped the footboard. I let fly at the man with my pistol and at the same moment heard the corporal's musket roar out behind my ear.

Digitized by Google

Then I tried to do what I should have done at first, and whipped out my second pistol to lay its muzzle against the driver's cheek.

But by this time half a dozen dark figures were scrambling along the roof from the rear, and as I swung round I felt a sudden heavy push against my shoulder, tottered for a moment, trod forward upon air, and went sprawling, almost headlong, over the side of the coach.

Luckily I struck a furze-bush first, but for all that I hit the turf with a thud that stunned me, as I must believe, for a minute at least. For when next I opened my eyes driver and guard were standing helpless in the light of the lamps, while a couple of highwaymen dragged my chest off the roof. Another stood by the heads of the leaders, and yet another was spread on the footboard, with his head and shoulders well buried in the boot. The rest had gathered in the rear about the coach door in altercation with the inside passenger. Close behind the near hind wheel lay the corporal, huddled and motionless.

My head darted pain as though it had been opened with a saw, and as I lifted myself and groped about for my pistols, I discovered that

Digitized by Google

my collar-bone was broken and my hip-muscles had taken a bad wrench. Hurt as I was, though, I managed to find one of my pistols, and crawling until I had the coach-door in view, sank into the ditch and began to reload.

The men at the rear of the coach were inviting the inside fare to come forth and hand over his money; which he very roundly refused to do, using the oddest argument; for he declared himself so far gone in consumption that the night air was as bad as death to him, the while that the noise he made proclaimed his lungs as strong as a horse's. This inconsistency struck the robbers, no doubt, for after a while a pistol was clapped in at the window and he was bidden to step forth without more ado.

But for my misery I could have laughed aloud at the queer figure that at length shuffled out and stood in the light of a lantern held to examine his money. In height he could not have been more than five feet two; and to say that he was as broad as he was long would be no lie, for never in my life have I seen a man so wrapped up. He wore a travelling cap tightly drawn about the ears, and round his neck a woollen comforter so

Digitized by Google

voluminous that his head, though large (as I afterwards discovered), seemed a button set on top of it. I dare be sworn that he unbuttoned six overcoats before he reached his fob and drew out watch and purse.

"There," he said, handing over the money, "take it—seven good guineas—with my very hearty curse."

The robbers—they were masked to a man—pressed forward around the lantern to count the coins.

"Give us your word," said one, "that you've no more stowed about you."

"I won't," answered the old gentleman. "All the word you'll get from me is to see you hanged if I can. If you think it worth while, search me."

Just then they were summoned by a shout from the coach roof to help in lowering my treasure. My pistol was reloaded by this time, and I lifted myself to take aim and account for one of the scoundrels at least: but in the effort my broken bone played me false; my hand shook, then dropped, and I sank upon my face in a swoon of pain.

I came back to consciousness to find myself

Digitized by Google

propped on the edge of the ditch against a milestone. The coach was gone. Driver, guard, highwaymen, even the corporal's body, had disappeared also. But just before me in the road, under the light of a newly-risen waning moon, stood the inside passenger, hopping first on one leg then on the other for warmth; and indeed the villains had despoiled him of three of his greatcoats.

I sat up, groaned, and tried to lift my hands to my face. My companion ceased hopping about and regarded me with interest.

"Lost money?" he inquired.

"Public money," I answered, and groaned again. "It means ruin for me," I added.

"Well," said he, "I've lost my own—every stiver about me." He began to hop about again, halted, and began to wag his forefinger at me slowly. "Come, come, what's the use? I'm sorry for you, but where's your heart?"

I stared, not well knowing what to make of his manner.

"Look here," he went on after awhile, "you're thinking that you've lost your character. Very well; any bones broken?"

"My collar-bone, I think."

Digitized by Google

"Which, at your age, will heal in no time. Anything else?"

"A twist of the hip, here, and a cut in the head, I believe."

"Tut, tut! Good appetite?"

He had approached, unwound his enormous woollen comforter, and was beginning to bandage me with it, by no means unskilfully. I thought his question a mad one, and no doubt my face, as he peered into it, told him so.

"I mean," he explained, "will you ever be able to eat a beef-steak again—say, a trifle underdone, with a dozen of oysters for prelude—and drink beer, d'ye think, and enjoy them both?"

"No doubt."

"And kiss a pretty girl, and be glad to do it?"

"Very likely."

"And fight?"

He eyed his bandage critically, stepped back upon the road and danced about, stamping with his feet while he cut and thrust at an imaginary enemy. "And fight, hey?"

"I suppose so,"

Digitized by Google

"Then, bless the lad," he exclaimed, stopping and looking at me as fierce as a rat, "get on your legs, and don't sit moping as if life were a spilt posset!"

There was no disobeying this masterful old gentleman, so I made shift to stand up.

"We have but one life to live," said he.

"I beg your pardon?"

"—in this world. God forgive me, I'd almost forgotten my cloth! We have, I say, only one life to live in this world, and must make the best of it. I tell you so, and I'm a clergyman."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Damme, yes; and, what's more, I'll take odds that I'm not the rector of this very parish."

By this time, as you will guess, I had no doubt of his madness. To begin with, anyone less like a parson it would be hard to pick in a crowd, and, besides, I remembered some of his language to the highwaymen.

"It *ought* to be hereabouts," he went on meditatively. "And if it should turn out to be my parish we must make an effort to get your money back, if only for our credit's sake, hey?"

Digitized by Google

"Oh," said I, suspicious all of a sudden, "if these ruffians are your parishioners and you know them——"

"Know them?" he caught me up. "How the devil should I know them? I've never been within a hundred miles of this country in my life."

"You say 'tis your parish——"

"I don't. I only say that it may be."

"But, excuse me, if you've never seen it before——"

"I don't see it now," he snapped.

"Then excuse me again, but how on earth do you propose—here in the dead of night, on an outlandish moorland, in a country you have never seen—to discover a chest of treasure which seven or eight scoundrelly, able-bodied natives are at this moment making off with and hiding?"

"The problem, my friend, as you state it is too easy; too ridiculously easy. 'Natives' you say: I only hope they may be. The difficulty will only begin if we discover them to be strangers to these parts."

"Have mercy then on my poor dull wits, sir, and take the case at its easiest. We'll suppose these fellows to be natives. Still,

Digitized by Google

how are you to discover their whereabouts and the whereabouts of my pay-chest?"

"Why, man alive, by the simple expedient of finding a house, knocking at the door, and asking! You don't suppose, do you, that seven or eight able-bodied men can commit highway robbery upon one of His Majesty's coaches and their neighbours be none the wiser? I tell you, these rural parishes are the veriest gossip-shops on earth. Go to a city if you want to lose a secret, not to a God-forsaken moor like this around us, where every labourer's thatch hums with rumour. Moreover, you forget that as a parish priest among this folk—as curator of their souls—I may have unusually good opportunities——" Here he checked himself, while I shrugged my shoulders. "By the way, it may interest you to hear how I came by this benefice. Can you manage to walk? If so, I will tell you on the road, and we shall be losing no time."

I stood up and announced that I could limp a little. He offered me his arm.

"It's an instructive story," he went on, paying no heed to my dejection; "and it may teach you how a man should comport himself in

Digitized by Google

adversity. Six weeks ago this very night I lost two fortunes in less than six hours. You are listening?"

"With what patience I can."

"Right. You see, I was born with a taste for adventure. At this moment—you may believe it or not—I'm enjoying myself thoroughly. But the deuce of it is that I was also born with a poor flimsy body. Come, I'm not handsomely built, am I?"

"Not particularly," I answered; and indeed his body was shaped like an egg.

"Confound it, sir, you needn't agree quite so offensively. You're none too straight in the legs yourself, if it comes to that! However," he continued in a more equable tone, "being weak in body, I sought my adventures in a quarter where a long head serves one better than long legs—I mean the gaming table. Now comes my story. Six weeks ago I took a hand at lasquenet in a company which included a nobleman whom for obvious reasons I will only call the Duke. He is of the blood royal, sir; but I mention him no more closely, and you as a gentleman will not press me. Eh? Very well. By three o'clock in the morning I had lost fifteen thousand pounds.

Digitized by Google

In such a case, young man, you would probably have taken your head in your hands and groaned. We called for wine, drank, and went on again. By seven in the morning I had won my money back, and was the Duke's creditor for twenty-two thousand pounds to boot."

"But," said I, "a minute ago you told me you had lost two fortunes."

"I am coming to that. Later in the day the Duke met me in St. James' Street, and said, 'Noy'—my name is Noy, sir, Timothy Noy—'Noy,' said he, 'I owe you twenty-two thousand pounds; and begad, sir, it's a desperate business for I haven't the money, nor the half of it.' Well, I didn't fly out in a rage, but stood there beside him on the pavement, tapping my shoe with my walking-cane and considering. At last I looked up, and said I, 'Your Grace must forgive my offering a suggestion; for 'tis a cursedly awkward fix your Grace is in, and one to excuse boldness in a friend, however humble.' 'Don't put it so, I beg,' said he. 'My dear Noy, if you can only tell me how to get quits with you, I'll be your debtor eternally.'"

The old gentleman paused, lightly disen-

Digitized by Google

gaged his arm from mine, and fumbled among his many waistcoats till he found a pocket and in it a snuff-box.

"Now that," he pursued as he helped himself to a pinch, "was, for so exalted a personage, passably near a *mot*. 'Your Grace,' said I, 'has a large Church patronage.' 'To be sure I have.' 'And possibly a living — with an adequate stipend for a bachelor—might be vacant just now?' 'As it happens,' said the Duke, 'I have a couple at this moment waiting for my presentation, and two stacks of letters, each a foot high, from applicants and the friends of applicants, waiting for my perusal.' 'Might I make bold,' I asked, 'to enquire their worth?' 'There's one in Norwich worth £900 a year, and another in Cornwall worth £400. But how the deuce can this concern you, man?' 'The cards are too expensive for me, your Grace, and I have often made terms with myself that I would repent of them and end my days in a country living. This comes suddenly, to be sure; but so, for that matter, does death itself, and a man who makes a vow should hold himself ready to be taken at his word.' 'But, my dear fellow,' cries his Grace, 'with the best will in the world you

Digitized by Google

can't repent and end your days in two livings at once.' 'I might try my best,' said I; 'there are such things as curates to be hired, I believe, and, at the worst, I was always fond of travelling.'"

The Reverend Timothy stowed away his snuff-box and gave me his arm again.

"The Duke," he continued, "took my point. He is, by the way, not half such a fool as he looks and is vulgarly supposed to be. He wrote that same day to his brother-in-law (whom I will take leave to call the Bishop of Wexcester), and made me its bearer. It is worth quotation. It ran: 'Dear Ted,—Ordain Noy, and oblige yours, Fred.' The answer which I carried back two days later was equally laconic. 'Dear Fred,—Noy ordained. Yours, Ted.' Consequently," wound up Mr. Noy, "I am down here to take over my cure of souls, and had in one of my pockets a sermon composed for my induction by a gifted young scholar of the University of Oxford. I paid him fifteen shillings and the best part of a bottle of brandy for it. The rascals have taken it, and I think they will find some difficulty in converting it into cash. Hullo! is that a cottage yonder?"

Digitized by Google

It was a small cottage, thatched and white-washed, and glimmering in the moonlight beside the road on which its whitewashed garden-wall abutted. The moonlight, too, showed that its upper windows were closed with wooden shutters. Mr. Noy halted before the garden-gate.

"H'm, we shall have trouble here belike. Poor cottagers living beside a highroad don't open too easily at this hour to a couple of come-by-chance wayfarers. To be sure, you wear the King's uniform, and that may be a recommendation. What 's that track yonder, and where does it lead, think you?"

The track to which he pointed led off the road at right angles, past the gable-end of the cottage, and thence (as it seemed to me) up into the moorland, where it was quickly lost in darkness, being but a rutted cartway overgrown with grass. But as I stepped close to examine it my eye caught the moon's ray softly reflected by a pile of masonry against the uncertain sky-line, and by-and-by discerned the roof and chimney-stacks of a farmhouse, with a grey cluster of outbuildings and the quadrilateral of a high-walled garden.

"A farmhouse?" cried his reverence, when

Digitized by Google

I reported my discovery. "That 's more in our line by a long way. Only beware of dogs."

Sure enough, when we reached the courtlage gate in front of the main building his lifting of the latch was the signal for half a dozen dogs to give tongue. By the mercy of heaven, however, they were all within doors or chained, and after an anxious and unpleasant half-minute we made bold to defy their clamour and step within the gate. Almost as we entered a window was opened overhead, and a man's voice challenged us.

"Whoever you be, I 've a gun in my hand here!" he announced.

"We are two travellers by the mail coach," Mr. Noy announced; "one a clergyman and the other an officer in the King's service."

"You don't tell me the coach is upset?"

"And one of us has a broken collar-bone, and craves shelter in Christian charity. What 's the name of this parish?"

"Hey?" The man broke off to silence the noise of his dogs.

"What 's the name of this parish?"

"Braddock."

"I thought so. Then mine is Noy—

Digitized by Google

Timothy Noy—and I 'm your rector. Weren't you expecting me?"

"Indeed, sir, if you 're Mr. Noy, the Squire had word you might be coming down this week; and 'twas I, as churchwarden, that posted your name on the church door. If you 'll wait a moment, sir—the coach upset, you say!"

He disappeared from the window, and we heard him shouting to awaken the household. By-and-by the door was unchained and he admitted us, exclaiming again, "The coach upset, you say, sir!"

"Worse than that: it has been robbed. We keep some bad characters in our parish, Mr. ——"

"Menhennick, sir; George Menhennick—and this is Tresaher Farm. Bad characters, sir? I hope not. We keep no highway robbers in this parish."

He faced us, rush-lamp in hand, in his great vaulted kitchen, and the light fell on an honest, puzzled face. As for Mr. Noy's face, I regret to say that it fell when he heard this vindication of his flock.

"I brought ye into the kitchen, sirs," went on Farmer Menhennick, "because 'tis cosier,

Digitized by Google

We keep a fire banked up here all night." He bent to revive it, but desisted as his wife entered with one of the house-wenches, and gave them orders to light a lamp, fetch a billet or two of wood, and make the place cheerful.

My face, I daresay, and the news of the robbery, scared the two women, who went about their work at once with a commendable quietness. But I think it was a whisper from the maidservant which caused the farmer to ejaculate, as he helped me to a chair:

"And you 've walked across Blackadon Down at this hour of night! My word, sirs, and saving your reverence, but you had a nerve, if you 'd only known it!"

"Why, what 's the matter with Blackadon?" asked Mr. Noy sharply.

Farmer Menhennick faced him with a deprecatory grin.

"Nothing, sir—leastways, nothing more than old woman's tales, not worth a man's heeding."

"Has it by chance," said I, "anything to do with a hearse?"

"A hearse!" Mr. Noy stared at me, and then his eye fell on the farmer, who had been

Digitized by Google

helping to unbutton my tunic, but was now drawn back a pace from me with amazement written all over his honest face. "A hearse?" repeated Mr. Noy.

"Why, however——" began the farmer, with his eyes slowly widening.

"A hearse," said I, "with black nodding plumes and (I believe) a headless driver. Let me see——" I began to hum the air sung by Jim the guard:—

"The wheels go round without a sound—"

The two women had dropped their work and stood peering at me, the pair of them quaking.

"He 's seen it—he 's seen it!" gasped the farmer's wife.

"A hearse?" cried Mr. Noy once more, and this time almost in a scream. "When? where?"

"On Blackadon Down, sir," answered Mr. Menhennick. "'Tis an old story that the moor 's haunted, and folks have been putting it round that the thing 's been seen two or three times lately. But there—'tis nothing to pay any heed to."

"Oh, isn't it!"

Digitized by Google

"You understand, sir, 'tisn't a *real* hearse——"

"Oh, isn't it!" repeated Mr. Noy in scorn. "And *you*, sir——" He had almost caught and shaken me by the collar, but remembered my hurt just in time. "And do you, sir, sit there and tell me that you've known this all along, and yet—oh, you numskull!" He flung up two protesting hands.

"But even if it's a real hearse—" I began.

"That's the kind most frequently met, I believe. And 'the wheels go round without a sound.' Yes, they *would*—on Blackadon turf! Any more questions? No? Then I'll take my turn with a few." He wheeled round upon the farmer. "Ever seen it yourself?"

"No, sir."

"Has anyone here seen it?"

No; but the maidservant's father had seen it, three weeks ago—the very night that Squire Granville's house was tried——

Mr. Noy was almost capering. "Splendid!" he cried. "Splendid! That will sharpen his temper if it don't his wits. The Squire's house was tried, you say?" He turned on the farmer again. "Hullo, my friend! I understood there were no law-breakers in this parish?"

Digitized by Google

"'Tisn't known for certain that the house was tried," the farmer explained. "'Tis thought that some of the lads was giving the old boy a scare, he having been extra sharp on the poaching this year. All that's known is, he heard some person trying his shutters, and let fly out of his bedroom window with a gun; and what you can build on that I don't see."

"You shall though." He began to cross-examine the girl. "At what time that night did your father see the hearse?"

"I believe, sir, 'twas soon after eleven. He has a cow, sir, in calf, and went round to the chall to make sure she was all right——"

Mr. Noy nodded. "And the hearse was passing—in what direction?"

"Towards the church town, sir; or, as you may say, towards St. Neot parish."

"Inland, that is?"

"Yes, sir. But later on that same night Reub Clyma, up to Taphouse, saw it too; and this time 'twas moving fast and making towards Polperro."

"Fits like a puzzle. Is Polperro a seaport town?" he asked the farmer.

"A sort of fishing town, sir."

Digitized by Google

"Your nearest? Good. And you reach it by a road running north and south across the coach-road? Good. Now if you wanted to drive to Polperro you could do so across the downs for some distance, eh? before striking this road. Good again. How far?"

"You'll excuse me, but I don't know that I rightly take your meaning."

"Then we'll go slower. Suppose that you wished to drive towards Polperro over turf, never minding the jolts, and not to strike into the hard road until you were compelled. How far could you contrive to travel in this way?"

Farmer Menhennick found a seat and sat scratching his head. "Three miles, maybe," he decided at length.

"And what sort of road is this when you strike it?"

"Turnpike."

"Indeed? And where's the pike?"

"At Cann's Gate."

"That tells me nothing, I'm afraid; but we'll put the question in another form. Suppose that we are forced at length to leave the turf and fields and strike into the road for Polperro. Now where would

Digitized by Google

this happen? Some way beyond the turnpike, I imagine."

"Indeed no, sir: it would be a mile on this side of the pike, or threequarters at the least."

"You are sure?"

"Sure as I sit here. Why the road goes down a coombe; and before you get near the turnpike, the coombe narrows *so*." The farmer illustrated the V by placing his hands at an angle.

Mr. Noy found his snuff-box, took a heavy pinch, inhaled it, and closed his box with a snap. Then he faced the farmer's wife with a low bow.

"Madam," said he, "you may put this young gentleman to bed, and the sooner the better. He has lost a large sum of money, which I am fairly confident I can recover for him without his help; and your parish—which is also mine—has lost its character, and this also I propose to recover. But to that end I must require your excellent husband to fetch out his trap and drive me with all speed to Squire Granville's." He paused, and added, "We are in luck to-night undoubtedly; but I fear I can promise him

Digitized by Google

no such luck as to meet a hearse and headless driver on the way. . . . One moment, Mr. Menhennick! Have you such things as pen, ink and paper, and a farm-boy able to ride?"

"Certainly I have, sir."

"Then while you are harnessing your nag, I'll drop a line to the riding-officer at Polperro; and if after receipt of it he allows a single fishing-boat to leave the harbour, he'll be sorry—that's all. Now, sir—Eh? Why are you hesitating?"

"Well, indeed, your reverence knows best; and if you force me to drive over to Squire Granville's, why then I must. But I warn you, sir, that he hunts to-morrow; and if, begging your pardon, you knew the old varmint's temper on a hunting day in the morning——"

"Hunts, does he? D'ye mean that he keeps a pack of hounds?"

"Why, of course, sir!"

Farmer Menhennick's accent was pathetically reproachful.

"God forgive me! And I didn't know it—I, your rector! Your rebuke is just, Mr. Menhennick. And this Church of England of

Digitized by Google

ours—I say it with shame—is full of scandals. Where do they meet to-day?"

"Four-barrow Hill, your reverence."

"Oh, no, they don't. On that point you really must allow me to correct you. If they meet at all, it will be at—what d'ye call it?—Cann's Gate."

* * * *

And so they did. The Granville Hounds are, or were, a famous pack; but the great and golden day in their annals remains one on which they killed never a fox; a day's hunting from which they trailed homewards behind a hearse driven in triumph by a very small clergyman without a head (for Mr. Noy had donned the very suit worn by Satan's understudy, even to its high stock-collar pierced with eye-holes). That hearse contained my chest of treasure; and that procession is remembered in the parishes of Talland, Pelynt, Lanreath, and Braddock to this day.

I did not see it, alas! Bed claimed the invalid, and Mrs. Menhennick soothed him with her ministering attentions. But Parson Noy reported the day's doings to me in a

Digitized by Google

voice reasonably affected by deep potations at the "Punch Bowl Inn," Lanreath.

"My son, it was glorious! First of all we ran the turnpike-man to earth, and frightened him into turning King's evidence. He was at the bottom of the mischief, of course; and the hearse we found—where d'ye think? Close behind his house, sir, in a haystack—a haystack so neatly hollowed that it beat belief—with a movable screen of hay, which the rogues replaced when the coach was stowed! We found everything inside—masks, mourners' hatbands, the whole bag of tricks; everything, barring your treasure, and that the preventive men dug out of the hold of an innocent-looking lugger on the point to sail for Guernsey. Four of the rascals, too, they routed up, that were stowed under decks and sleeping like angels."

"And the coachman? And the guard?"

"Squire Granville has posted off half a dozen constables towards Falmouth; but I 'll lay odds that precious pair are on shipboard before this and heading out to sea. I 'm sorry, too, for they were the wickedest villains of the piece; but they'll be sorry before they have finished waiting at Guernsey. One can't

Digitized by Google

expect everything; and Providence has been mighty kind to us."

"To me, at all events."

"And to me, and to my parish."

"Yes, to be sure," said I; "the parish is well rid of such a bogey."

"I wasn't thinking of that," said he dryly. "I 've recovered my sermon."

THE END.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google